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Big-breasted Cheerleaders	✓	nope	nope	✓	Nope
Get pissed on after u die	✓	Nope	nope	Nope	nope
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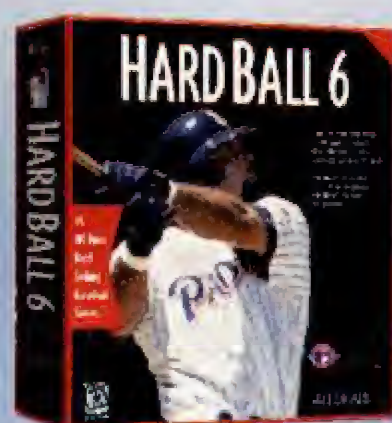
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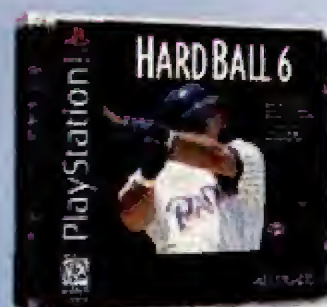
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VOLUME 5, NUMBER 5

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Enough's Enough

Like flies on a corpse in Quake II, bugs are swarming on just about every game on store shelves these days. However, these bugs—code errors or feature omissions—are more of a nuisance: They're like those tiny Nosecums (no-see-ums) in New England. You may not see them at first, but when they bite—oh, does it hurt.

The plethora of errors infesting many of the games we've reviewed in recent issues—from such prominent publishers and developers as Activision, Sierra, and id—is a travesty that hurts more than just the gaming experience and gamers' wallets. It's damaging to the people responsible for them, the entire industry, and the hobby. (Star Trek Pinball and Monty Python's The Meaning of Life are at the top of this issue's bug list.)

New gamers migrating from consoles want to plug it in, turn it on, and have it work. Win 95 makes that promise but rarely delivers. Long-time, savvy PC gamers know to buy their games from stores that have a "no questions asked" return policy, and they know where to go for fixes and tech support. The newcomer often just gives up.

Letters I've received make it clear that even some hardcore gamers are starting to say enough's enough. When the games won't run out of the box, they're saying "What's the point?" giving up on their PCs, and going back to consoles.

We at PC Games believe (and do our best to communicate) that the rich gaming experiences PCs have to offer in comparison to consoles is worth the trouble. But it's getting harder to make a persuasive argument as the problem gets worse, not better. Evidence: id and Quake II. id has long stood tall in the face of market pressure to release one of its games prematurely. "It will ship when it's done" used to be id's mantra. Well, since Quake II was rushed out the door for Christmas, it's been patched at least a half-dozen times (we're on version 3.14 as of this writing). One of those patches was a major "point" release, which added features that should've been in the shipping version. It was then followed by two more minor patches.

Sierra's Red Baron II, ProPilot, and Lords of Magic were clearly far from finished when they shipped—patches for all are still coming; and Activision's Heavy Gear needed some substantial patching immediately after its release. (It's ironic that all of the above missed their original ship dates by wide margins.) These offenders are not alone—there are far more guilty parties than we've space to mention.

We don't expect all games to be perfect. Patches should exist to iron out compatibility issues related to the myriad of different equipment in PCs, or to provide subtle improvements based on customer feedback. But patches shouldn't be required to run a game after you've bought it—and they definitely shouldn't be a crutch the industry uses to make a Christmas ship date.

It's time to shape up: Many long-standing, fine reputations are starting to tarnish; and if it keeps up, the market will shrink, not expand. With today's rising development costs, no one wants that.

Steve Klett
Editor in Chief
sklett@pcgames.com



PUBLISHER

Cynthia C. Sandor

EDITORIAL

EDITOR IN CHIEF	Steve Klett
EXECUTIVE EDITOR	Rob Smith
ASSOCIATE MANAGING EDITOR	Corey Cohen
FEATURES EDITOR	Willem Knibbe
NEWS & TECHNOLOGY EDITOR	George T. Chronis
COPY EDITOR	Karen Eng
EDITOR AT LARGE	Daniel Morris
ASSISTANT DISC PRODUCER	Christopher Tou
EDITORIAL/PRODUCTION INTERN	Danny W. Lam

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Barry Brenesal, David Gerding, Chris Hudak,
Bob Lindstrom, Andy Mahood, Peter Olafson

DESIGN / PRODUCTION

ART DIRECTOR	Bruce Gardner
SENIOR DESIGNER	Ruth Walker
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Gloria Orbegozo

SUBSCRIPTIONS

SUBSCRIPTION CUSTOMER SERVICE	800-688-4575 pcgamesubs@pcgames.com
LIST MANAGEMENT	Dan Chupka IDG List Services 888-434-5478 ext. 826



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PC Games (ISSN 1089-3695), Connecting Gamers to Games, is published 10 times per year for \$18.00 a year (magazine only) by PC Games Publishing, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Ste. 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; (650) 349-7100; An IDG Company: The World's Leader In Information Services On Information Technology. The PC Games name and logo are trademarks of PC Games Publishing. Periodicals postage paid at San Mateo, CA, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to PC GAMES, P.O. Box 59710, Boulder, CO 80328-9710. Change of Address: Please send old label and new address to PC GAMES, P.O. Box 59710, Boulder, CO 80328-9710. GST 131 304 347. Foreign and Canadian orders must be prepaid in U.S. dollars on a U.S. bank and must include \$25/year additional for shipping (air delivery). No part of this publication may be printed or reproduced without written permission from the publisher. PC Games makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of articles published in the magazine and assumes no responsibility for damages as a result of errors or omissions. PRODUCED IN USA.

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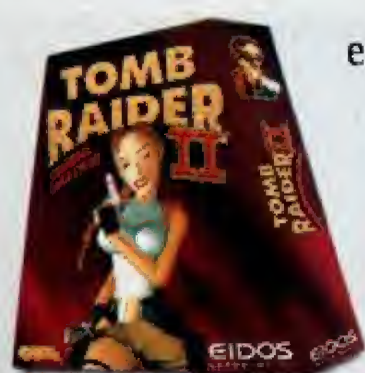
SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS **OF DEPRESSION**

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ | Persistent sadness and or irritability. |
| ■ | Recurring thoughts of how much better life would be if you had Deathtrap Dungeon or Tomb Raider II. |
| ■ | Statements such as, "I'm bad. I'm stupid. No one likes me." |

When depression strikes, immediately seek the help of a trained professional at your local computer game store.



Wiping secretions



Research shows that the leading cause of depression among gamers is a noticeable lack of Eidos games. Fortunately, this deficiency can be treated both safely and effectively with games like Deathtrap Dungeon or Tomb Raider II. But early intervention is crucial. Or else, it's only a matter of time before they threaten to do something really stupid, like go to therapy.



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Demo of the Month:

Meridian 59: Renaissance (Studio 3DO)

Exclusive:

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Plus These Demos:

Battlezone (Activision)
Croc (Fox Interactive)
EarthSiege 3: StarSiege (Dynamix)
Forsaken (Acclaim)
FPS: Ski Racing (Sierra On-Line)
Heavy Gear (Activision)
Interstate '76 Arsenal (Activision)
Longbow 2 (Origin)
Montezuma's Return! (Utopia Technologies)
Mysteries of the Sith (LucasArts)
Pharaoh's Ascent (Ambertec)
Quest for Glory V: Dragon Fire (Sierra On-Line)
Tomb Raider II (Eidos Interactive)
Ultim@te Race Pro (MicroProse)
Warhammer: Dark Omen (Mindscape)

MindSpring

Mplayer

HEAT

Meridian 59: Renaissance

Get it free for a week!

Meridian 59 has been out awhile now, undergoing a few changes, additions, and plot developments to keep the faithful entertained. Renaissance is possibly the biggest overhaul to date. It's a whopping 80MB of new textures, graphics, and tweaks to give the universe a welcome new paint job. Let the adventure continue...

THIS IS IMPORTANT:

Read the information at the start of the setup program—it explains a few details about this upgrade. You will have to rebuild your room files by revisiting rooms (but they'll look better!), and there's more advice for existing as well as new players.

Important Tech-Help FAQ

- Q:** When I run the interface, I get a message that says "Can't find VB40016.dll" or some other "Can't find" file error.
- A:** Just run the setup file by clicking on the Start button, Run, then type d:\setup.pif (where "d" is the letter of your CD-ROM drive).
- Q:** During the setup routine, I get a message that says "Can't register file."
- A:** In this case, you will get a dialog box asking to Abort, Retry, or Ignore the error. Click on Ignore. The setup routine will be executed successfully, and the interface will run without problems.
- Q:** This demo doesn't work.
- A:** Read the notes accompanying each game in the description box—they'll cover most eventualities. Refer any game-

specific tech-support questions to the game's publisher. Help is also usually posted on publishers' Web sites.

- Q:** Should I reinstall DirectX when prompted by a game's install program?
- A:** As a rule, no. Be aware that most current demos now use DirectX 5.0, which can be found in the root directory of the CD-ROM.
- Q:** I didn't get the CD-ROM with my magazine. How can I obtain one?
- A:** To upgrade your subscription from non-CD to include this feast of gaming greats, direct your inquiries to pcgames subs@pcgames.com.
- Q:** I tried all the above, and I'm still having problems.
- A:** Direct CD tech-related questions to ctou@pcgames.com.

Here's where you'll find all the games on this issue's CD. Click on any of them to highlight the relevant information about a game.

The easiest way to vote for the PC Games Greatest Game of All Time. Click here for a direct link to the ballot.

DEMOS

- Battlezone
- Croc
- EarthSiege 3: StarSiege
- Forsaken
- FPS: Ski Racing
- Grim Fandango
- Heavy Gear
- Interstate '76 Arsenal
- Longbow 2
- Meridian 59: Renaissance
- Montezuma's Return

HEAT NET

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Meridian 59: Renaissance

QUIT

Once you've selected a game from the Demos list, information about that game, installation advice (which may be pretty important, so please take a moment to read it), and some gameplay hints appear in this box.

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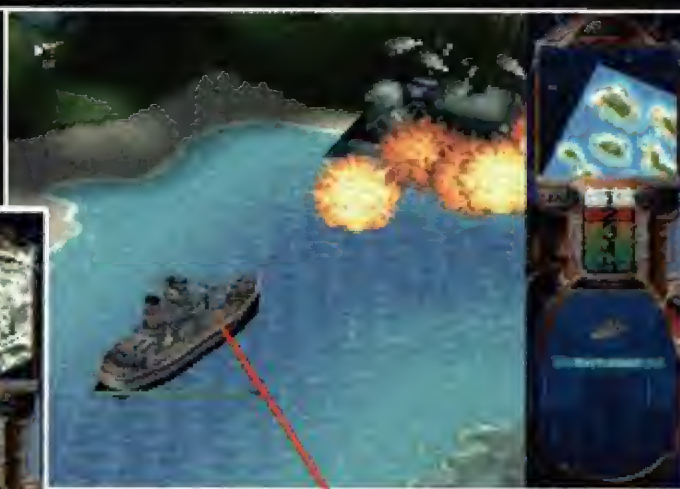
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Gunship



Stealth
Transport



MK1
Walker



MK5 Walker



MK3
Walker





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Levelmaster, a searchable database with thousands of downloads, including user-submitted levels, skins, and patches. Crank up realmx.com and let the downloads begin!

PLANET QUAKE IS HERE

That's right, Quake fans—Planet Quake has joined Games.net to keep you updated on all those mods, skins, and other Quake-related items. You can also visit the Planet Quake Network's other sites, including Ritualistic.com, Gamegirlz.com, and more. Get your Quake fix here!

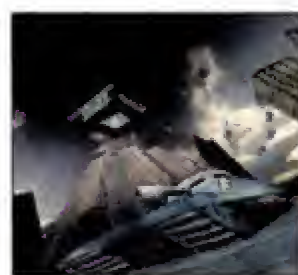


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Our community channel has been up and running for a while now and is gaining momentum. Voice your opinion on a variety of subjects on one of our message boards, start a topic of your own and watch the thread grow, and chat with *PC Games* and Games.net staff. This is also the new home for Prophet's News, the definitive source for info on all things game-related.

IT DOESN'T STOP THERE!

There's more where that came from. Check out our Sniper, Grumpy Gamer, and InGaming columns for informative, provocative looks at the world of gaming. We also chat with game developers like I-76 project director Scott Krager (the guy who played Taurus). And we feature an exclusive interview with *The X-Files* composer Mark Snow on creating the musical score for Microsoft's upcoming *Urban Assault*. You'll find cheats and hints, too, including a walkthrough for *Alien Earth*. All this and more—only at www.pcgames.com!



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DEMOS

Heavy Gear
Longbow 2
ManaLink (Magic: The Gathering add-on)
Mysteries of the Sith
Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee
PC Games TA Unit & Map
RealGolf
Sanitarium
SubSpace v. 1.33

PATCHES

Andretti Racing: Glide/H3D Update
Armor Command
Die by the Sword: Cyrix Patch
I-76 Gold Upgrade
Longbow 2: Beta D3D Patch
Montezuma's Return! v. 1.20
Quake II v. 3.14

PREVIEWS

Army Men
Golden Tee Golf
Rise of the Shadowhand
Total Annihilation: Core Contingency
Ultim@te Race Pro
The X-Files

NEWS

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SANCTUARY





INCOMING!

Question of the Month: Too Much Hype?

What's bigger than the movie *Titanic* and sinks faster than the original? Yup, it's computer-game hype. We of all people know what it's like to want the scoop on upcoming games. But when we see titles missing long-promised features when released, and Web sites devoted to games due in two years, we wonder about the perils of early promotion. Do you appreciate reading early news/info/ads about game stuff, or would you rather wait until a game's out, so you can get the *definitive* word? Send your thoughts to *PC Games*, Letters to the Editor, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Ste. 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; email: pcgamesletters@pcgames.com. One letter-writer gets a free game and a *PC Games* T-shirt. Please include your full name with each letter.

Music in Games?

Easily one of the most popular Questions of the Month ever, February's query about the value of game music had the email server groaning and the postman cursing (or, um, maybe that was just us). The overwhelming consensus: music in games is truly important (or, as prize-winner Lori Manthei put it, "a vital part of selling the idea"), though there was a 50/50 split over whether you'd pay extra for it. Here are some of your responses:

Games without music? No way! Even the most primitive video games had music (*Asteroids'* incessant bass riff, *Pac-Man's* wacka-wacka-doo). Music adds so much to the gaming experience—I can't imagine not having it playing while I'm playing.

C. Chris Mills

Via email

Music in the game—depends. If you're an online player, music isn't important and in most cases is a system hog, slowing gameplay by taking up valuable bandwidth. And sometimes, it can hinder your gameplay by covering the sounds made by other players. In single-play, though, music is great: It adds atmosphere and can set the mood for the coming battle.

Daniel A. Homa

Via email

If you think about it, no game *needs* music. In fact, the sound of music

actually detracts from the experience of the game as a whole, unless the game is a strategy title. After all, in most shooters and adventure games, if you really were in these virtual environments, would you be hearing music? I think not.

S. Ham

Longmont, CO

I wouldn't pay a lot extra for games with music done by professional musicians: When playing games, I often listen to my own music CDs. On the other hand, the music in games like *Red Alert*, *I-76*, and *Quake II* actually improves the gameplay.

Jake Black

Via email

When I hear that heavy-metal guitar of Trent Reznor's original *Quake* theme, it gets my adrenaline pumping, and I'm ready to go frag someone or break stuff.

Travis Tastove

Via email

Great music in games should be a staple. What really makes me "jump" in a game and puts me on the edge of my seat? Music. Good music in games sets the mood better than any trilinear, mip-mapped graphics ever could.

Jeremy Elder

Via email



New Hits?

The X-COM titles are the best strategy games I've played and a major part of my collection. *Crusader: No Remorse* and *No Regret* are awesome, too. Are there are more sequels on the way for these series?

Qaisar Sarwar

Via email

Great games indeed, Qaisar. MicroProse is currently working on X-COM: *Interceptor* for a summer release. The company says *Interceptor* will add two big features to the X-COM strategy mix: real-time first-person combat and a multiplayer deathmatch mode, in which players can have at it in 3D space combat in custom-designed spaceships. Sad news for *Crusader* fans: With the defection of series creator Tony Zurovec to Digital Anvil, Origin has nixed *Crusader: No Mercy*—with the proviso that "We may still continue the series one day." Let's hope so. —Ed.

More Lara! No Lara!

I loved the Lara Croft poster in your February '98 issue—it's awesome! Keep up the cool work!

Joe Roberts

Via email



Forget sheep—I have a new goal for the genetics community: Make a Lara Croft! Any guy out there would gladly fund it.

Josh Rukse

Via email



Breasts may sell, but your purposeful pandering to the whole Lara Croft mythos is inexcusable and borders on the vile. I'm a hardcore gamer, but I won't buy or play Tomb Raider because of its offensive nature. There are ways to create best-selling, kick-ass software that don't further the gender wars or sink to using breasts. Think sales: if you don't actually go out and woo the 51 percent of the populace I represent, at least don't go out of your way to insult us.

Elizabeth J. Braswell

Producer, Simon & Schuster Interactive

Via email

Stupid features like your centerfold make all videogamers look like a bunch of sexually depraved drooling geeks.

Blake Sparkes

Via email

I must admit I was pleased with the extensive TRII coverage in the Feb. issue, though I still haven't had enough Lara. Can you hook me up with some game demos, posters, beach towels, bumper stickers, window clings, the works? Do you have any more of those centerfolds? On the back of the TRII box there's a picture of Lara in a black two-piece bathing suit; do you know where I can find it? Can I have it enlarged and made into a poster for my wall?

Eric C. Danforth

Via email

I'm not sure if you know this, but Lara Croft isn't real: she's a computer-generated graphic. You would have a hard time making out with her. Maybe you should step away from your PC and try to find a date with a *real* person.

Jason Ebner

Via email



Editors' Choice Awards

When you picked SSI for the Lifetime Achievement Award, you knew what you were talking about—though you left out the names of their best games (the best computer games ever, really): Pool of Radiance, The Dark Queen of Krynn, Pools of Darkness, and Curse of the Azure Bonds. I've beaten every one of these AD&D games.

Steven Krussel

Via email

I've played I-76 and loved it, but I think that Outlaws should have won for Best Soundtrack. When I wasn't playing it, I was listening to its soundtrack on my CD player. I'd even find myself whistling some of the songs. The music really gave me the feeling I was in the Old West.

Hai Nguyen

Via email

You guys were totally right about Jedi Knight being Game of the Year. It took your breath away. I'm normally not a real fan of first-person shooters, but this game gave me second thoughts. I loved the lightsaber and the overall gameplay.

Kamil Włodarczyk

Via email

Though I agree with most of your Editors' Choice awards, why the hell is Dungeon Keeper the Best Real-Time Strategy? OK, there's a hand, you pick up guys, then you drop 'em...then what? When I think real-time strategy, I think of Red Alert: You choose a side, build up your base, make guys, and attack the other team. Plus you have spy missions, water, air, land... everything. This game should have won.

Toby Kavukattu

Via email

Whoops

Must have been the Black Oil clogging our minds, but we made a couple of goofs in March's X-Files feature. The game's director of photography is actually Jon Joffin—Greg Roach is the CEO of Hyperbole Studios, the game's developer. Also, the correct order number for The X-Files: Unrestricted Access is 888-369-0031. We apologize for the errors.

Rants!

The place to bash what you hate most in gaming. Send gripes to rants@pcgames.com.



I have anxiously waited for a decent PC football game. Madden 98 heralded the promise of "liquid AI" and a 3Dfx patch, and I figured it would compare gameplay-wise with NHL 98. Well, woe to those who succumbed to the siren's song, because even with the 3Dfx patch and my totally loaded system, **THIS GAME SUCKS.**

James Rose

Richmond, British Columbia

What's up with the PGL? Gaming is supposed to be for fun, not a job. I don't care about people like Thresh and all those other computer geeks competing, but I do care about them getting paid for it. You would have to have such low self-esteem to pay to watch him fight, it's not even funny.

Nate Miklowski

Cleveland, OH

I am damn tired of all of you lame snipers who guard an area with plenty of power-ups and a cowardly high-perched spot. Be real players and meet us men face to face. You measly cowards.

Morgan Siegel

Via email

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Voodoo II

Arrives Ahead of the Pack

Voodoo II is here. Just as this issue was going to press, Creative Labs surprised us with a 3D Blaster Voodoo II board—right off the production line, silicon still warm. Creative's rush to market at the end of February makes it the first video card-maker to get a Voodoo II board on store shelves—close to a month ahead of Diamond's Monster 3D II, as well as months ahead of accelerators based on updated nVIDIA and PowerVR chipsets.

Creative spokeswoman Tina Wilmott says the company, realizing that there's a lot of pent-up anticipation for Voodoo II, saw it had an opportunity to enter production of the new 3D Blaster a month earlier than expected and "jumped at the chance."



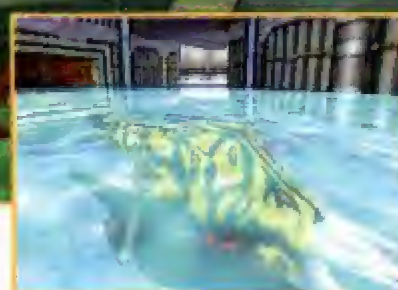
Creative is the first card-maker out of the gate with a Voodoo II accelerator.

Creative is shipping two versions: a \$229 8MB model (\$199 after a \$30 mail-in rebate) and a \$299 12MB model. Creative provided *PC Games* with an example of the 12MB 3D Blaster. Given the level of gamer anticipation about Voodoo II, we immediately put the new Creative 3D accelerator through its paces. Although an in-depth review will appear in the next issue of *PC Games*, this is what we learned with only two days to spare before press time.

The 3D Blaster Voodoo II fulfills most promises made by 3Dfx, but not in every instance. Using a P200 as a test bed, we pitted Creative's card against Canopus' Pure3D. We chose to compare these because the 12MB 3D Blaster is to the 6MB Pure3D what we expect the 8MB 3D Blaster will be to the 4MB Monster 3D.



Voodoo II cards will make the most impact on Quake-based games like Half-Life.



Last November, 3Dfx claimed that the Voodoo II's

dual texture-memory units would double the performance of the Voodoo I's single texture-memory unit. As an OpenGL accelerator, the 3D Blaster fulfills this promise, doubling or more than doubling frames-per-second benchmarks in tests we ran. Using the Pure3D, GLQuake delivered between 30 fps and 50 fps. With the 3D Blaster, that range jumped to between 35 fps and 225 fps. Switching to time

continued on page 34

COVERT OPS

Empires Expands

Ensemble isn't wasting any time prepping a new legion of code to expand its Age of Empires franchise. Where the original's timeline topped out in the Hellenistic era, AOE2 adds a dozen new cultures fitting into a time period spanning the 4th-century late Roman Empire to the Renaissance. Cultures that are looking firm for the sequel include the Byzantine, Saracen, and Frank, as well as the feudal samurai, Teutonic Knights, Britons, Vikings, Celts, Mongols, and Islamic Egyptians. Notable new features include a grander visual scale for castles, buildings, and emplacements; support for unit formations;



Joust, anyone?

garrisoning castles and forts with troops for greater effectiveness; and a 300 percent increase in maximum map size.

Among the other changes are land-based trade caravans, more realistic ship animations, each culture having a unit of its own, the addition of ore as a resource, and the elimination of gold as a mining resource. Gold can still be earned, but only via trade.

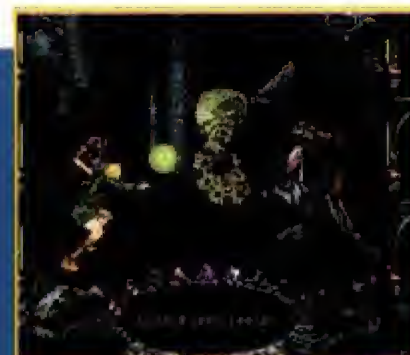
AOE2 is scheduled to disembark in stores this summer.

Virgin Strives On

Continuing rumors of impending doom/sales/IPO for Virgin Interactive Entertainment haven't stopped the company from

working on some hot-looking titles. Swords and Sorcery: Come Devils, Come Darkness is a gorgeous RPG that'll let you choose either turn-based or real-time combat, as well as allow you to switch to the perspective—both first- and third-person—of any of the six members of your party.

The brainchild of Wizardry 4, 5, and 6 creator David W. Bradley, S&S should provide more than 100 hours of gameplay. The visuals of the pre-alpha build we saw were awesome, with massive indoor and outdoor environs and character/monster



Fight or die in Swords and Sorcery.

continued on page 34

Indy 3D

If there's one property LucasArts hasn't exploited to its fullest, it's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Sure, there are those (poor) mini desktop-adventures, but nothing of the scope and scale of the games based on the *Star Wars* universe. That's about to change. According to sources close to LucasArts, it's working on a first-person Indiana Jones game called *Indiana Jones 3D*. We'd love to show you some development screenshots, discuss the engine behind IJ3D, and offer some juicy plot bits, but the company would neither officially confirm nor deny the project. "We'll likely announce our E3 lineup in the first part of April," a LucasArts spokesman says. "A lot of things will come to light then."

Indy was made for 3D.



Ion Gets Unreal

Although Epic MegaGames' *Unreal* has yet to make it to store shelves, its engine continues to make the rounds. MicroProse has already licensed it for duty in *First Contact*, and now Ion Storm is laying out cash to use it to power *Shooter*, designer Warren Spector's upcoming game. Apparently Spector was especially impressed with *Unreal*'s scripting language, which makes it easier to customize and control characters and environments. *Shooter* is a 3D role-playing espionage game slated for a late-1998 release.

The Revenge of Hexen II

With all the hubbub surrounding *Quake II* in recent months, it was easy to overlook the late-'97 debut of *Hexen II*. By the time *Hexen* fans read this, their support of the game will have been rewarded with a mission pack called *Portal of Praevus*. The \$29.95 upgrade adds a fifth character called *Demoness*, plus two new



Hexen II mission pack

adversaries and one new boss. Developer Raven Software says it got a lot of feedback from gamers that the emphasis on swords and pig-stickers in *Hexen II* was overdone, so they decided to create the *Demoness* to balance out gameplay. She uses range weapons—throwing fire and acid from her fingertips—instead of depending on melee weapons like the *Crusader* and *Paladin*. There's a new Tibetan world with 10 levels, and additional effects such as falling snow. No deathmatch levels will be included; however, there's a good chance that Raven will post some new ones on its Web site. An interesting CTF variant called *Siege* may also be available for download. One team must defend crown and castle from another team, who must storm the ramparts. Both teams get to use their own siege weapons in addition to the standard set.

More CART Racing

Psygnosis has lined up a licensing agreement with one of the championship teams in Formula One competition—Newman/Haas Racing. That's actor Paul Newman, if you had any doubts. Psygnosis will have released the first game—fittingly titled *Newman/Haas Racing*—under the license by the time you read this. The game includes 15 real drivers and 11 actual tracks, of which there will be a balanced selection of oval, street, and permanent race tracks. ABC/ESPN motor-

mouths Danny Sullivan and Bob Varsha provide in-game commentary.

Mysterious Level

There's a secret level hidden in an "unsupported" zip on the *Jedi Knight: Mysteries of the Sith* disc. Gamers must take the files that are in the archive and make them into an episode using editing tools available on the Net. While that might seem like a pain, the episode is pretty cool—casting players as Luke and starting on *Bespin*. The object is to go through the whole level, fighting *Boba Fett*, *Mara Jade*, and *Kyle* (where *Darth* should be) in the air-shaft finale from *The Empire Strikes Back*. If you don't want to do the work, check our Web site at www.pcgames.com for the finished episode.

Wire Updates

Here are some more cool-looking games on the way: *Burnout* (Bethesda Softworks) brings the world of drag racing to the PC. Customizing your racer with a myriad of possible combinations (using an extensive help manual) will be part of the fun before you land at the starting grid to burn rubber. Stored stats for reaction times, speed, and other features will be logged in season play.

Hang out at bars? If so, you may recognize *Golden Tee 3D*, one of the most popular arcade games of the last couple of years. Developer *Incredible Technologies* is bringing the same style to the PC, offering up simple game mechanics and three unique courses.

Lose countless hours to the town-planning shenanigans of *SimCity 2000*? Prepare for the long-awaited sequel, *SimCity 3000*. Maxis has canned the original plan for a fully 3D city in favor of highly detailed buildings you'll view with *SimCity*'s classic 2D perspective. Players will develop popular locations from around the world.

—G. Chronis,
W. Knibbe, R. Smith, and H. Sterbako

TOYS

No Buttons Required

While it's hard to imagine what Microsoft could do to improve upon its amazing gamepad, the hardware folks in Redmond have come up with the innovative new SideWinder Freestyle Pro. Larger and more robust in construction than the SideWinder, the Freestyle has highly sensitive sensors built in—much like the ones used by the automobile industry to operate air bags. The pad notes its starting position, then



Gamepads just got smart.

the sensors monitor your body's up-and-down as well as left-and-right movements. When tested with Microsoft's upcoming (yet-to-be-named) 3D motocross game, the Freestyle excels—making complex

cycle-jumps and stunts easy. It also adds a throttle to its SideWinder-style button arrangement. Microsoft will ship the \$74.95 gamepad this fall.

Monster 3D II Rebate

For gamers who dropped between \$150 and \$200 for Diamond's Monster 3D accelerator, the prospect of it being made obsolete by the new Monster 3D II (which will use the Voodoo II chipset) probably doesn't sit too well. While it's true that technology will march on regardless of consumer sensibilities, Diamond is at least responding to its current Monster customers. Included with the \$249 Monster 3D II will be a \$50 rebate coupon for all Monster 3D owners. Better save those proof-of-purchase seals and manuals!

Sony Spins at 32x

Despite many 32x CD-ROM drives hitting store shelves these days, Sony is trying to add in some extra features that will make its drive stand out from the pack, including compatibility with CD-Recordable and CD-Rewritable



discs. Sony has redesigned the spindle motor and added a vibration-canceling mechanism that balances spinning CDs to reduce the excess noise and vibration typical of high-speed drives. The \$129 CDU711's tracking technology maintains the drive's constant rate of spin at its fastest speeds. Many gamers have been confused by 24x drives that rarely spin up to 24x speeds—gravitating somewhere between 12x and 24x. The CDU711 doesn't have to slow down its rotational speed to read data on the outer tracks of a CD, so it may do a better job of living up to its 32x designation.

Comm Link

Online Deadlock

Accolade has announced NetAccolade, a free Internet matching server similar to Battle.net and Bungie.net. NetAccolade provides a centralized online community where users can congregate and launch multiplayer Accolade games against others of similar skill level and game preference. Accolade's first title to bundle the new service is Deadlock II, and all of the company's future products—including Hardball 6,



Deadlock II is the first NetAccolade game.

Redline, and Star Control 4—will include NetAccolade support. With the exception of Jack Nicklaus 5, no other games from the accolade catalog will be supported on the service.

Internet Zone Submits to Netscape

Perhaps it was technical issues about how Netscape Navigator implements DirectX, but not long after Microsoft began its latest sparring contest with the Department of Justice, the Zone announced that it will finally support the other Web browser with the release of Zone 4.0 (Z4). Unless complications arise, Z4 should be in circulation before summer. In addition to supporting Netscape, Microsoft is adding tools to support online tournaments. The Zone has been averaging up to 1,000 Age of Empires players a night, many of whom want ladder matches.



Netscape Navigator will now be welcomed on the Zone.

Mplayer Lands Unreal

Many gamers still doubt whether Unreal will ever be released, but don't tell the folks at Mplayer. They're sure Epic's shooter will be headlining on the online-game service's Action Channel. Mplayer plans to set up extensive promotions tied to Unreal to broaden the channel, although their deal's not characterized as exclusive. Epic says Unreal will ship by summer.

Voodoo II cont.

refreshes in GLQuake II, the performance boost wasn't as startling, but it was still impressive. The Pure3D averaged between 25 fps and 30 fps, but the 3D Blaster hummed along at a steady 60 fps no matter what, thanks to a speed regulator id added to the game.

Where the 3D Blaster fell short was in our Direct3D test using Jedi Knight. The Pure3D averaged between 40 fps and 60 fps, but the 3D Blaster was only marginally better at between 50 fps and 60 fps.

It will be interesting to see what Voodoo II will do for Quake-based games such as Half-Life and SiN, which are slated to have 3Dfx OpenGL as standard video options.

But new challenges later this year from nVIDIA and PowerVR may overtake much of what 3Dfx's chipset does so well, given that both companies are getting much better at supporting OpenGL.

By April, gamers will see the first 3D accelerators using nVIDIA's new RIVA 128ZX chipset, and by midyear, nVIDIA will have completely replaced its RIVA 128 production with the updated chipset, says nVIDIA director of strategic marketing Michael Hara. Major changes

include bumping frame-buffer memory up to 8MB from 4MB. The changes will boost resolution to a maximum of 1,600-by-1,200 in 24-bit color at 85Hz. Hara says performance may leap as much as 50 percent as well.

Some of the performance gains will come as a result of a completely new set of drivers. The new drivers will be completely backward-compatible with RIVA 128 video cards, Hara says, and should increase performance "by a minimum of 10 percent."

He also reports that Diamond and STB are already on board for the RIVA 128ZX, and gamers should expect to see PCI and AGP versions based on the chipset from both board makers by summer. The major change in AGP models is support for AGP 2x 66MHz speeds, compared to 33MHz with the original RIVA 128 cards.

Like 3Dfx and nVIDIA, PowerVR has a new 3D-accelerator chipset coming—maybe as early as midyear. The chipset makeover marks a complete turnaround in philosophy for PowerVR. Although the original's specs always looked good, and games like Ultim@te Race written



Outwars is a D3D game.

specifically for PowerVR cards looked great, the sad truth was that Direct3D and OpenGL games just didn't look as good as on Voodoo I or RIVA 128 accelerators. Rather than fight, PowerVR has switched.

The Second Generation chipset was designed to be a D3D and OpenGL board. No longer will PowerVR try and get game developers to code specifically for its hardware. Second Generation highlights include boosting performance to five times that of the current PCX2 PowerVR chipset, 1,600-by-1,200 resolution in 24-bit color, unified texture- and frame-buffer memory, and 2x AGP support. In addition, the performance of the Second Generation chipset will no longer be tied to the speed of a computer's CPU—leveling out performance in more PC installations. PowerVR expects Second Generation AGP accelerators to feature 4MB of memory and PCI models to come with 8MB. —George T. Chronis

COVERT OPS CONT.

graphics resolutions that keep their detail at extremely close range—without requiring a 3D card. RPG fans should keep an eye out for it late this fall.

VIE is also readying a good-looking action/RPG game called NOX. While it may resemble Diablo in its isometric dungeon-crawling perspective, NOX's gameplay is much different. Combat is fought almost entirely with magic, and players must cast and cue up spells on the fly with various key manipulations, which should make for some cool multiplayer battles. NOX will appear late this year or early next year. VIE also has a hot racer in the works for fall called Sportscar, and a frenetic arcade-shooter set for late summer called Recoil.

Siege Works

EarthSiege fans will be happy to learn that Dynamix plans to have the third install-

ment of the game ready for September. High on the list of goals for EarthSiege 3: Starsiege is robust Internet multiplayer. Dynamix is so intent on Internet play that it's scheduled up to four technology-beta releases of the game (you'll find the first one on this month's PC Games.exe and available for download at www.pcgames.com). Each technology release tests different aspects of the game and features a minimal subset of Herc units and map levels. Those interested in participating can get more information at www.dynamix.com/es3. In the final game, all mission maps will be single- and multiplayer capable; and, à la Quake II, vehicles will have customizable skins and multiplayer matches will be server-based.

Blitzkrieg Attack

German developer Wings Simulations has come up with a D3D-only World War II action tank simulator called Panzer Elite. Set in Europe between 1942 and 1944, the game will feature skirmish, campaign, and instant-action gameplay in realistic battlefield settings. You can choose to play either as the German or American army. Multiplayer options include support for up to four players in

Internet and LAN matches—Psygnosis says that with more than four players, the gameplay bogs down too much. The company will release the game in North America this fall.



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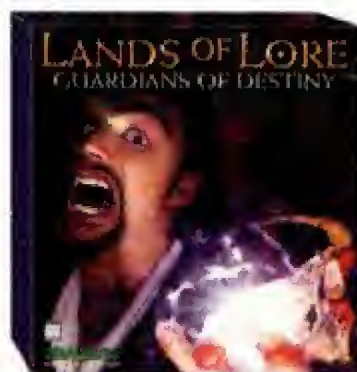
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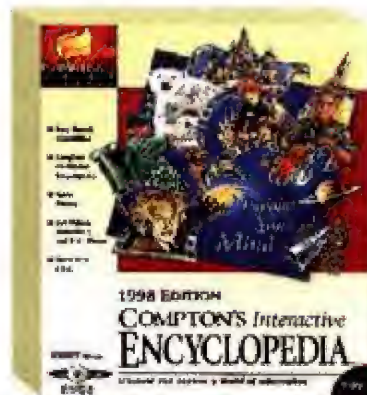
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STEVE KLETT

Sick of all the crappy F-Listers out now? Why not take a closer look at games you might've missed—or haven't played for a while?

Gaming Doubletake

It's spring again, and that means Spring Cleaning—time to dump all the old games off my hard drive to make room for the new.

So I rolled up my sleeves and got ready to mercilessly purge not only the old games, but also the neglected ones still in their boxes gathering dust.

Why? Well, spring is traditionally slow in terms of new and interesting titles shipping—which is the reason I had time to clean house in the first place—and this year's *really* slow. There are several Fs in this issue alone, and the number of Ds and Cs has been up across the board the last few months. Not only is the quantity of titles dropping, but so's the quality. What's a gamer to do, play Riana Rouge? Hey, I'm not that desperate—yet.

As I sat down at my PC, something strange happened: I found myself booting up some of the old games I thought I was going to delete and getting absorbed by them again. Some were really old; others just got

overlooked in the holiday blitzkrieg.

So here's my list of old and not-so-old favorites. Perhaps there are one or two titles you might enjoy as well.

First up are a couple oldies but goodies: MicroProse's **1942**:

The Pacific Air War:

Fed up with the perennial delay of the next breed of World War II flight sims—Screamin' Demons Over Europe, 1943: European Air War, Confirmed Kill—I fired up what is perhaps my favorite game of all time. (OK, I'm cheating. I was never going to delete this one.) Sure, PAW's graphics are dated, but its breadth of options has yet to be matched. Once I got over the technical step backwards, I was once again enjoying peppering Zeros from the gunner position of a Dauntless dive-bomber. For my money, there's still no better virtual-cockpit system than PAW's.

Maxis' **SimCity 2000**: My conscience simply wouldn't let me drag this folder into the Recycle Bin. In fact, I found myself once again trying to re-create the Bay Area on my desktop. This is one game that'll never lose its appeal—well, at least until SC3000 ships this fall. If you think there can be nothing fun about building a city, think again.

Next up are some not-so-oldies: games we rated highly that I haven't had time to give their due. Perhaps you haven't, either, as they've not really broken sales records.

SSI's **Imperialism**: This turn-based strategyfest in the mold of Civ II is a candle-burner. Once you get into it, it's hard to stop conquering. Nice



AI, a random world generator, and balance are among its selling points.

Avalon Hill's **Over the Reich**:

Next up is this turn-based air-combat game focusing on the WWII European theater of operations. As I

went to delete it at around 8 p.m., I realized I

never did quite finish that German campaign. Next thing I knew it was 3 a.m. If you liked Panzer General and you're interested in airplanes, you owe it to yourself to check this one out—and its cousin **Achtung Spitfire**.

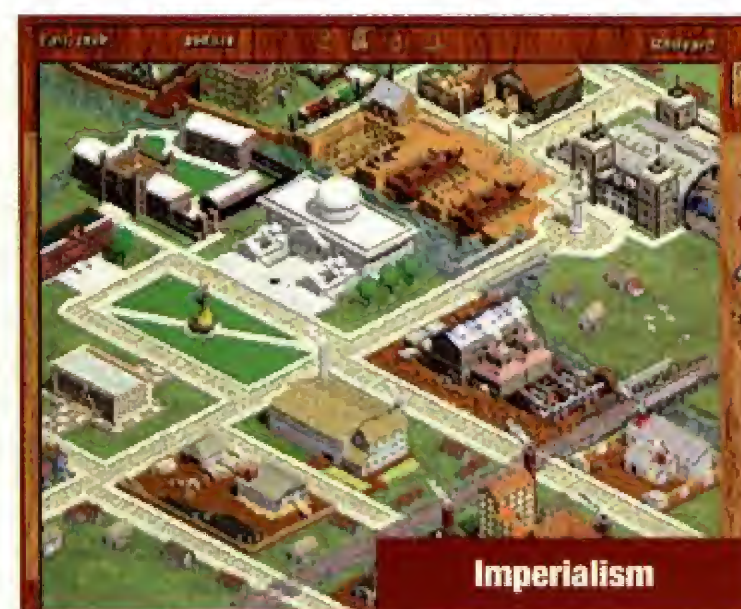
3DO/Cyclone Studios' **Uprising**: There's still a bunch of 3D real-time strategy games on the way, but Uprising was at the crest of the wave. Though perhaps more action than strategy, Uprising's ability to shift from first- to third-person perspective, cool visual effects (with a 3Dfx card), and frenetic pace are too fun to miss.

Virgin Interactive/The Logic Factory's **The Tone Rebellion**: Sure, you've all played the C&Cs and Warcrafts to death, and perhaps even Dark Reign, Age of Empires, and Total Annihilation, but what about this surreal real-time strategy game? We gave it an A- back in December, but it was easy to miss in the rush of real-time clones. Nice visuals, unique gameplay elements, and plain weirdness make The Tone Rebellion worth a second look.

My list is getting long, so I'll just rattle off a few more: SSI's **Dark Colony**, Activision's **NetStorm**, Psygnosis' **G Police**, Sony's **Tanarus**,

I-Magic's **Seven Kingdoms**. I've even been having fun with the original **Space Invaders** (find out how in this month's Weasel's Watch).

So while fresh new games may be hard to find, take heart: There are lots of good ones still available



that you may have missed. Dig through the bargain bin too—there just might be a copy of PAW to be had for a song...

Been playing a good game lately—old or new—that others might enjoy? Let me know at ThePlayer@pcgames.com.



Uprising

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Babbage's





Quake-Killers Don't Exist

I have a long, troubled history with the first-person shooter. Marathon sessions of testosterone-overcharged Doom and Duking over the years put an irreparable, ever-deepening dent in the available time I had to get (buy, beg, borrow, or steal) a social life.

Then came Quake, and it was all over. There were a few dalliances here and there, but Quake ruled our office for a long time—'til Jedi Knight came along. Its Force Powers added a whole new range of elements to the simple mix served up by Quake. And we played it. A lot. And then came Quake II, and we played JK less. Now, sadly, JK barely gets a look. Which leads me to this question: What about all the so-called Quake-killers due this year? Will they have legs? Frankly, I'd be surprised.

My prediction: All the fans of this genre will play SiN, Unreal, Daikatana, Half Life, Prey, and Duke Nukem Forever in single-player mode, give it a blast at multiplay, and then head straight back to Quake II.

Which of the above list—all titles from highly talented, reputable developers—most catches the imagination? Valve's Half Life, because of its strong enemy AI—which not only makes monsters dodge bullets but also gives you a petrifying sense that they're alive.

But multiplay? I figure that Half Life is going to be a marvelously detailed and immersive single-player experience with OK multiplay (the whole engine's based on Quake). But I bet that soon after completing the single-play, I'll be back on the Quake II servers.

What about Unreal? For starters, where the hell is it? A genuine Quake-killer is only a contender if it comes out in the same time frame. Well, now we're on Quake II. Haven't seen much mention of Quake II-killers—is that because id raised the ante so high so quickly, no one has the balls to stand up and say theirs is likely to top it? Quake II has been on the shelves for a few months—can Unreal catch up? It certainly has a chance.

Unreal's engine is evidently flexible and, vitally, configurable enough to include very strong and complete editors. This is probably its strongest feature. Enemies dodge—seen it. Colored lighting—seen it. Cohesive storyline—do I really care? The power of online play, and the key to a game's lasting appeal, is user involvement. Let's face it: id didn't exactly

make it easy for users to get involved in level and mod design, but the configurability was there, so eventually, the enhancements appeared. Unreal's built-in configurability is its chance to shine. But it's now so damned late, and there are enough people churning out quality Quake (and QII) mods, I wonder if there's any point.

And as for SiN, Daikatana, and Prey, are they ever going to ship? The last loiters on the vaporware list, while Daikatana was originally scheduled for last October. Then December. Then March. I'm betting the delay was because of Quake II. Ion Storm must've gone back to the drawing board on several occasions to fine-tune their baby.

Their current plans are ambitious, as well they should be—what's the point in releasing something that doesn't match up to a 6- or 12-month-old game?

What Quake and Quake II manage, like Doom before them, is simplicity. Half Life might have the AI, SiN the, errrrr, monsters and story, Daikatana the role-playing skew, Duke the engaging personality, and Unreal the editors, but we want action—something that

doesn't require a tremendous number of buttons and controls. (JK's options are its boon but also its bane because it's more complex to play.) Quake II delivers the action simply, in bucketloads.

So there is no Quake II-killer on the horizon. The next big thing for action-shooter fans to get all gooey over has to be id's Trinity. It's going to be another engine, it may ship prematurely with nothing more than a few decent levels, but so long as it retains the simplicity of Doom, it's going to be a winner.

And "Quake-killer" will continue to be a misnomer for wannabes hoping to score in a match that's already over, as far as the multiplayer-action crowd's concerned.

The fabled Quake-killer doesn't exist. It can't. It's impossible. I'll eat my hat if one ever appears (other than out of id's stable). And you have that in writing.

Which first-person-shooter vaporware are you most eager for? Let me know at blade@pcgames.com.



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DANCE THE GRIM FANDANGO

The latest graphic adventure from the makers of Full Throttle propels you on a 3D journey through the Land of the Dead for an epic tale of corruption, greed, growth, and altruism

Mexican folklore suggests the Land of the Dead isn't much different from the Land of the Living—people fall in love, get married, have kids, work, sleep, eat. Everything we do here, they do there—it's just that they're not flesh and bone.



El Marrow at festival time is one happening place.

In Mexico, you can buy little papier-mâché scenes depicting life in the Land of the Dead.

"I've always liked those—they're called Calaveras actually," says Tim Schafer, Grim Fandango's project leader, as he pointed to four Calaveras sitting on a small TV in his office. "And that's where the main idea for [the game] came from... It's like a dark mirror of our world."

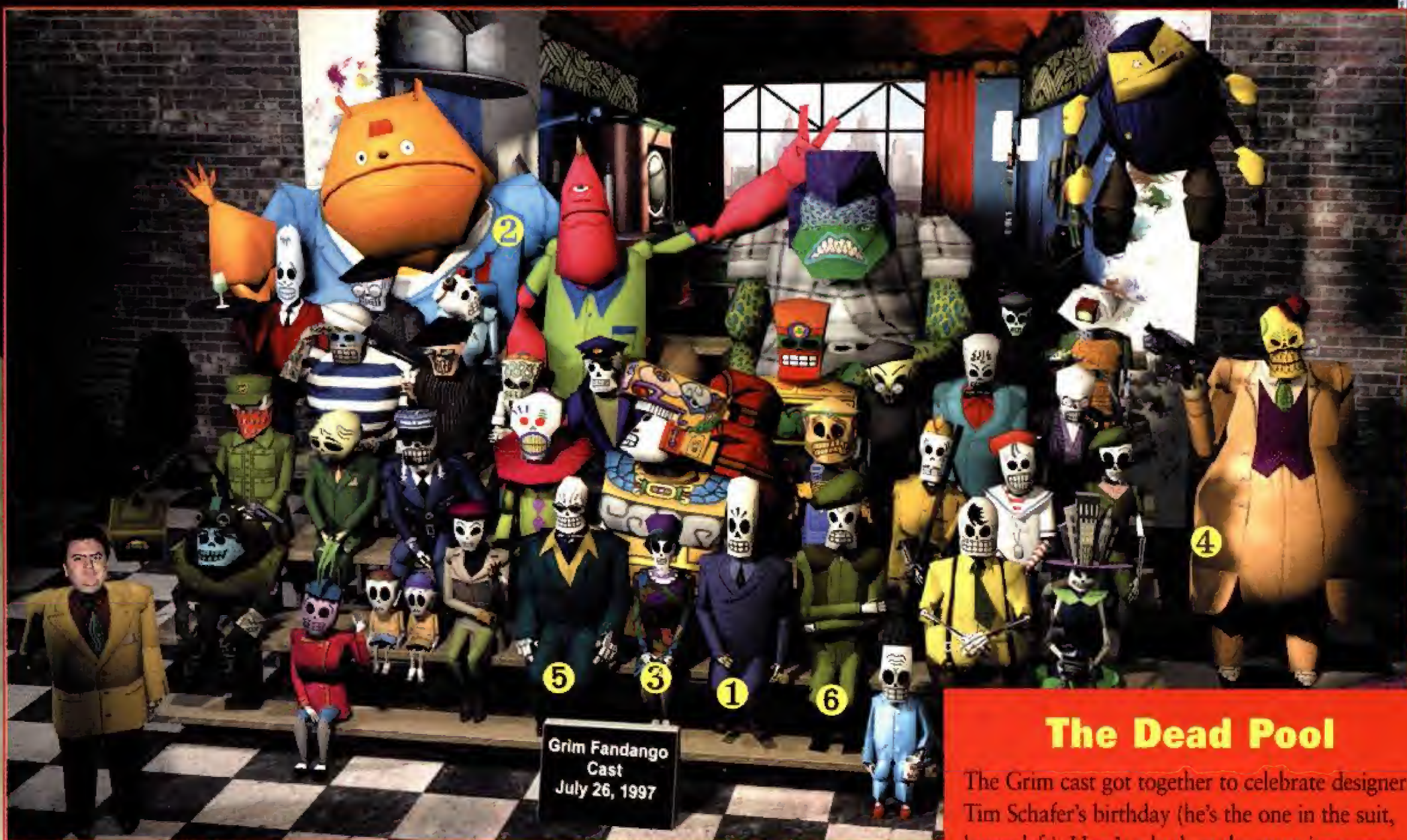
Schafer casts a spotlight on this mirror in Grim Fandango, an archetypal story of one man's journey through perilous realms on a quest to end corruption, right past wrongs, and save his soul.

It's an ambitious project for LucasArts, a company whose rich history in the graphic-adventure genre includes such gems as Secret

of Monkey Island, Day of the Tentacle, Full Throttle, and Sam and Max Hit the Road.

With that kind of track record, it's fair to say Grim Fandango has the potential to set new standards in the genre. It's the largest adventure game the company has ever conceived: Its story unfolds over four years, and there are some 80 puzzles for you to solve along the way. It's also the first 3D adventure LucasArts has attempted, requiring a new game engine and a different approach to graphics. Grim Fandango is its first game with no interface—no clutching hand, no cursor. And it's a bizarre but classic story—I mean, you're the Grim Reaper, for heaven's sake, and you're a good guy fighting against the evil powers that be.

By Willem Knibbe



PC Games traveled to LucasArts' headquarters in San Rafael, California, to meet with the minds who've been toiling for more than two years to create this dark and lively dance.

The story

You play Manuel (Manny) Calavera, travel agent for the dead. He's part Grim Reaper, part down-on-his-luck salesman. His job is to go to the Land of the Living and escort folks to the Land of the Dead. Once they've arrived, he sells them a travel package for the four-year journey all must make to reach their final resting place.



Manny, in full Grim Reaper garb, prepares to escort a customer to the Land of the Dead.

Like everyone else, Manny just wants to get to the "nice" underworld, the Land of Eternal Rest. But he can't until he meets his sales quotas for premium packages. And he just never

seems to get the primo customers—those entitled to deluxe tours because they've lived a good life. Manny's stuck in a dead-end job in a Dead world.

That's where you come in. The first puzzle is figuring out how to steal a hot lead from a rival salesman. The customer, Mercedes Colomar, led an exemplary life. On paper, she's due a fancy, first-rate package. But what Manny doesn't know is that her ticket's been stolen and replaced with a third-rate travel package. The only thing Manny can sell her is a jaunt into the woods alone.

Well, poor Manny thinks he botched the case, and he gets busted by his boss. Plus, Hector LeMans, the evil crime-syndicate leader who's secretly running things, thinks Manny is getting too close to his ticket-stealing scam and wants to "sprout" him. (Sprouting is how those in the Land of the Dead, uh, die. You get shot, you turn into a flower bed: you've been sprouted.)

Manny's got to get out of town, so he hires a driver, Glottis—a Big Daddy Ross-inspired demon. The two set off to find Mercedes and fix her case. Slowly

Manny finds things are much more complicated than he could've ever imagined: there's an evil web of corruption, deceit, and lies in the Land of the Dead—many, many people

The Dead Pool

The Grim cast got together to celebrate designer Tim Schafer's birthday (he's the one in the suit, lower left). Here's a look at the most important characters:

1 Manuel Calavera (Manny)

The Travel Agent of Death is Grim's protagonist. You'll guide him on a four-year journey through the Land of the Dead as he seeks to end corruption, right past wrongs, and save his soul.

2 Glottis

Manny's sidekick/driver is a big lovable doo-fus prone to tearing his heart out to show how upset he is.

3 Mercedes Colomar (Meche)

Meche, the sexy femme fatale, deserved an A-ticket trip through the Land of the Dead but didn't get it. Her case kicks off the game and sends Manny to the ends of the Land of the Dead in his quest to do the right thing.

4 Hector LeMans

This arch-nemesis leads the Land of the Dead crime syndicate. He's a larger-than-life, fatherly, jovial villain.

5 Domino Hurley

Hector's right-hand man. He's a top salesman in Manny's office, a slick, macho guy who uses his position to push Manny around.

6 Salvador Limones

Salvador leads the Lost Souls Alliance, an underground guerrilla group that suspects abundant misdeeds in the Land of the Dead.

have had their tickets stolen and are missing.

"Manny has to take the four-year journey that he's been selling to people all these years and retrace their steps to find out where they've all gone," Schafer says. "So it's kind of a road-trip story and a buddy film, and it's



The entrance to the prison colony at the edge of the world.

also a femme fatale *Double Indemnity*-type deal with a little *City of Lost Children* thrown in, and *Chinatown* and *Casablanca* and *The Big Sleep*."

During the course of the game, which looks and plays like one of the film-noir flicks mentioned above, you'll travel through more than 90 locales in such diverse environments as a bustling, festive metropolitan city called El Marrow, a petrified forest filled with creepy monsters, an exotic port town called Rubacava, the ocean floor, a prison colony at



The slick Domino Hurley, Manny's chief rival and Hector LeMans' right-hand man, discussing travel packages with Manny.

the end of the world, a Mayan temple on a snowy mountain, and then all the way back to El Marrow, which has been transformed into a Vegas-type setting (think showgirls in Mayan masks). You'll become a sea captain and run a nightclub. And if you play your cards right, you'll end up a hero.

"It's the most ambitious story I've ever tried to do," says Schafer, who was also project lead on *Full Throttle* and worked on the first two *Monkey Island* games and *Day of the Tentacle*. "I've never been able to do a story where the characters actually change. Every year, their relationships and positions in the world change. People who were good one year are bad the next.

"Overall, it's very bizarre and weird, but the characters are very down-to-earth.

Their motivations are easy to understand; the bad guys are clear, the good guys are clear, the love interest is clear. It's something I think everyone can relate to—it's just painted in a very strange way."

The birth of death

The story had been brewing in Schafer's mind for years—he even pitched Grim

and *Full Throttle* simultaneously to the keepers of the LucasArts purse strings. Because a tale about skeletons in the Land of the Dead is a little more difficult to grasp than a story about a biker, *Throttle* got the green light.

Its success meant Schafer had a little more leeway, and he was still thinking about those *Calaveras* figurines.



Manny getting the lay of the land outside his club, the Calavera Café.

"I thought it'd be so fun to see them come to life and run around. The fact that their bones are all painted on the outside of the figures led me to think about 3D graphics and texture maps. People were trying to do realistic human beings [in 3D], but they looked kind of silly. I thought if you could do something that had a more stylized look, you'd hit what you're aiming for."

Just the Facts, Ma'am

Title: Grim Fandango

Designer: Tim Schafer

Release: Fall 1998

Estimated Street Price: To be determined

Required: P133, 24MB RAM, 4MB video card (preliminary specs)

Recommended: 3D graphics accelerator that supports Direct3D

Setting: The Land of the Dead

Environments: More than 90 locales in 5 worlds

Characters: Six main; interact with more than 50

Puzzles: 80

Cut-scenes: Approximately 30

Dialogue: More than 7,000 lines (300 in cut-scenes)

Movies Cited as Influences: *The Big Sleep*, *Casablanca*, *Chinatown*, *The City of Lost Children*, *Dark Passage*, *Double Indemnity*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Of Mice and Men*, *On the Waterfront*, *The Usual Suspects*, *Vertigo*

Darkly immersive innovations

Grim is lush and detailed, colorful and creative—even more so if you have a Direct3D graphics accelerator. Think *Nightmare Before Christmas*, and you'll have an inkling as to some of Grim's fantastical creatures and detailed environments. Characters move cohesively, with articulated joints. The environments and architecture reflect Mayan and Art Deco influences—in 16-bit color. And Grim's noir feel is abetted by its cinematic presentation, rat-a-tat dialogue, and larger-than-life (death?) characters.

Full Throttle's cinematic presentation was intended to make someone in the next room



Inventory objects are stored and accessed in Manny's coat.



There's no flashing cursor or grabbing hand. When two interesting objects are close together, Manny will crane his neck to first look at one, then the other.

think they're overhearing a movie. Grim's goal is for someone watching over your shoulder to think it's an animated feature with odd pacing.

"I wanted to get rid of some of the artifacts that kind of scream computer game because they're on the screen all the time—icons and cursors and things that aren't really part of the fantasy," Schafer says. "Everything you're seeing is in that world."

"That's why Manny is the interface. He's indicating what's hot, what's touchable, what's

of interest by turning his own head. The inventory comes right out of his own coat. There's nothing slapping you in the face, reminding you that you're playing a game."



While you'll have the usual action keys—look, examine, pick up, inventory, use—Schafer and the rest of the team are debating whether you'll drive Manny with screen-relative controls or character-relative controls.

"Mario-style or Tomb Raider-style," Schafer muses. "I like them both, and we'll probably put both of them in."

Beyond SCUMM: The Grim Engine

Every existing LucasArts adventure game is powered by SCUMM. No, not scum, SCUMM: the Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion, an engine created by Ron Gilbert to quickly and effectively make 2D graphic adventures.

Well, Gilbert left LucasArts to found Humongous Entertainment and Cavedog Entertainment, and 2D has given way to 3D. So LucasArts needed a new engine to make a 3D graphic adventure.

The engine doesn't have a hip acronym yet, and its tools are a work in progress, says Bret Mogilefsky, Grim's lead programmer.

"We're constantly adding to tools or scratching and redoing them as we get a clearer sense of what they need to do or could do better. The core coding time on the tools, however, happened in the last year or so," says Mogilefsky, whose hard work will mark the first time he's programmed a game from start to finish.

The codebase is entirely different from SCUMM's, while it retains many of the same concepts, Mogilefsky says.

"We have the same basic structure and components as SCUMM did: a scripting language, a text system, an animation choreography tool, interactive music, etc.," he explains. "The main difference is that this engine was built from the ground up to be used for games with 3D characters and very detailed backgrounds."

Meshing the 16-bit-color 2D backgrounds with the 3D character animations has proven to be a great challenge, but it also leads to the biggest benefits during gameplay.

"We can do things we were never able to do before in a SCUMM game," Mogilefsky says. "We can show characters from all angles without spending the artists' time animating them in various direc-

tions. We can cut from angle to angle dramatically. We can do animation programmatically, such as getting Manny to swivel his head. We can cut to close-ups during conversations. We get smoothing and speed from 3D hardware acceleration. We can swap out character meshes for interesting effects: flowing robes, for example. We get a fun 3D inventory. The list goes on and on..."

To get the most out of Grim, you'll want to play it with a 3D accelerator that supports Direct3D. You can still play it without an accelerator, but you'll miss some cool stuff.

"It'll still be in its usual 640-by-480, 16-bit glory [without a D3D card]," Mogilefsky says, "but it won't have filtered textures, an extra-zippy frame rate, particularly creepy and clingy shadows, weird environmental effects, extra pigeons, and so on."

Enhanced sound-effects are also a possibility with the new engine, which supports Aureal's A3D chip by virtue of using Jedi Knight's hardware libraries. It's still uncertain how much, if any, A3D sound will be included in the final Grim Fandango, though it's unlikely D3D audio support will be included.

Grim's engine, which also incorporates a modified version of Jedi Knight's level editor (known as Leia), will likely be the one to power LucasArts adventure games into the next millennium.

"It won't be without some engine rewrite, but there are lots of chunks that can be carried over to the next one," Mogilefsky says. "The scripting language has worked out really well, as has the animation choreography system. The walk system and cameras are already in 3D; all we have to do is start rendering backgrounds on the fly as well."

And pin down a cool acronym...

—WK

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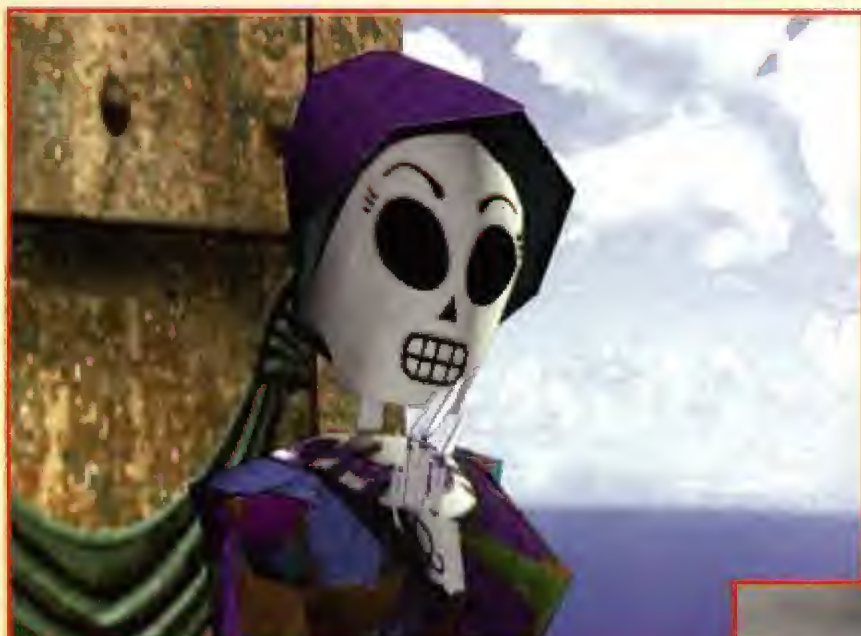


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Puzzle chains

Whatever your preferred navigation method, you'll have to solve puzzles and chains of puzzles to get from one year to the next.

For instance, in the first year, you solve one puzzle, then another, then have a choice of two, and they open to three puzzle chains of two puzzles each. Year Two immediately opens into three chains of five to seven puzzles.

"Grim is in four sections (the game years): each one opens onto itself, then they all come to a bottleneck between each year," Schafer says. "It's linear, it branches, and the branches get longer."

The puzzles themselves range from the fairly simple to the tricky to the hilarious. In one of the first (getting your boss to sign a work order allowing Glottis to become your driver), you have to use the classic adventure-game techniques of talking to everyone, sneaking around

rooftops, climbing through windows, and messing with machines. In a Year Two puzzle, you need the dock-workers' tools. What better way to get them than to start a strike? Go get that socialist literature, convince the workers to lay down their tools, and you're in business.

These engaging puzzles should help make Grim deeply immersive, a term



Glottis rolling down the highway in his rockin' roadster.

usually reserved for first-person shooters. Indeed, as with some notable newcomers in that genre, LucasArts had to create a new engine for the game's 3D requirements (see SCUMM sidebar).

"I love 2D: it's a great way to show off artistry," Schafer says. "But I'd done it and wanted to try something new, with the flexibility to move the camera around, see

characters from different angles, merge animations together so that you can very easily have a character talking while performing any of its actions, like jumping off a building. There's something about the character being re-created every time from the rules—as opposed to a strict bitmap—that seems more alive to me."

Making the Land of the Dead come alive, grab you, and pull you in takes every trick of the trade—immersive 3D environments, an innovative interface, multifaceted characters, and a grand, epic, archetypal story. Grim Fandango is looking like it has all the ingredients to be one satisfying dance. ■

On the PC Games CD-ROM

Take a peek at the Grim Fandango .AVI on this month's PC Games.exe. Next issue, we'll have the exclusive playable demo!



Bruno Martínez and Manny on the way to the train station, which is a portal to the Land of Eternal Rest.

Painting Skeletons: Grim Fandango's Art

Bringing Grim Fandango's characters and environments to life took well over two years and the combined talents of 22 artists, more than have worked on any previous LucasArts adventure game.

The process started in early 1996, when lead artist Pete Tsacle locked himself in a room with designer Tim Schafer and three others to flesh out the puzzles and final storyline. Once complete, concept sketches and storyboarding began.

During this time, Tsacle assembled the team of animators, background artists, and texture artists. Then came the nitry-gritty work.

"I sort of just let the story's various influences guide the process," Tsacle says. "It's a concept based in Mexican folklore: its Day of the Dead folk art was the springboard for the game itself, most specifically for the character designs. We also decided that the world should be very colorful and vibrant—both to be visually reminiscent of a Day of the Dead festival, and to move the look away from the drab stone-and-



metal dark grays and browns so predominant in 3D computer games."

With storyboards and Peter Chan's concept art and sketches guiding them, the artists used Photoshop to create textures, with SoftImage handling the brunt of the 3D tasks.

"Fandango was meant to be 3D in a way that none of us had seen 3D used before, and we always planned to be able to take advantage of all the cool things that go along with that—building whole sets for the scenes to take place in, using lots of different camera-angles, lots of fun with lighting..."

The lush environments and detailed character animations do indeed blend to create a 3D universe unlike any we've seen before.

—WK

Pro Active

Professional computer-gaming is no longer a matter of speculation—the first championship tournament of the Professional Gamers' League showcased what could be the sport of the 21st century. Is online pro-gaming the next big thing or the next big pipe dream? PC Games takes you inside the brave new world of online gaming for dollars.

By Daniel Morris

The showdown is taking place in a ring closed off with a four-foot barrier, around which a crowd is gathered six or seven deep, all jostling for a better glimpse at the contest. Inside the ring, squinting under the glare of TV lights, their faces stoic even when fans cheer their names, two combatants do battle.

Of course, neither guy is moving very much. Just his hands, really.

It's the quarterfinal round of the AMD Professional Gamers' League, and Dennis Fong seems to be in total control of challenger Jim Dancil. Not that their real names mean much to anyone. Fong is arguably the best-known computer gamer in the world, but his fame is accorded to the online handle Thresh, the name with which he drove off with id Software don John Carmack's Ferrari, after establishing himself as the world's best Quake player at last year's Red Annihilation tournament.

Dancil plays as Reptile, the leader of Southern California's Clan Postal, and though Reptile and Thresh have squared off before and scrimmage often, it looks like Thresh is going to do his routine thumping today. He's up 7-1



More than 10,000 came to GameWorks in Seattle to watch the PGL Finals.

with just five minutes remaining in the 20-minute, one-on-one deathmatch.

Though this match is between the two best players in the tournament, it doesn't look much different from any of the others—which is to say, it's exactly like watching two guys play a computer game. I'm standing right behind Thresh, watching his monitor over his left shoulder. Over his right shoulder is a video crew that's webcasting this match live on the Internet, dangling a microphone boom over the guy's head. ABC.com interviewed him right before the match as he went through his meticulous setup routine.

With the announcer intoning soberly that "this will be an almost impossible deficit to erase," Reptile begins to make his comeback. Eyes locked on his monitor, face expressionless even when his frags are cheered by the



Red Alert champion David Magro (DeepBlue) holds a very big check.

surrounding onlookers, he starts to land rocket shots and gets lucky when Thresh slips into lava more than once.

Momentum turns. Thresh accidentally kills himself, and Reptile ties it 6-6 in a flurry of kills. With just over a minute left, Reptile traps Thresh in a dead end and zaps him, taking a 7-6 lead. He scores three more kills in a hectic last minute, while Thresh scores one as the audience counts down in chorus—five! four! three! two! one!—and then erupts in applause as the match ends. Reptile stands, visibly shaken, momentarily overwhelmed with having handed Thresh a 10-7 loss—the first time Thresh has ever been defeated in organized play.

The winner finds himself under the immediate assault of a camera crew, microphone, and tungsten light. All he can manage, in the finest tradition of underdog winners, is “Wow. I just kind of stunned myself. This won’t really set in until later.”



Gamers like us? The PGL finalists hanging out before the action starts.

Luckily for Thresh, it’s a double-elimination tourney. He comes back to beat Reptile 5-1 and 5-2 to retain the title of world’s best Quake player. Hey, folks, this is starting to sound like a real sport.

Let the games begin

Computer gaming as spectator sport? The world got its most hyped look at the phenomenon at the Seattle branch of GameWorks, the

new chain of super-arcades. The PGL is the brainchild of the Total Entertainment Network (TEN), the online-gaming service that’s hoping to nurture the Professional Gamers’ League into a national event.

“We considered the event a big success on most fronts,” says PGL spokesman Garth Chouteau of the Seattle championship tournament, which drew 10,000 spectators over the last weekend in January.

“I don’t think it was perfect. I don’t think the Super Bowl was perfect the first time around.”

The Super Bowl? If TEN and its bevy of corporate sponsors (see sidebar) hope the PGL can be nursed to the size of one of the world’s most-watched sporting events, it sure has a long road ahead. Around 10,000 people saw the championships, the culmination of a three-month season for which 1,500 gamers registered. Anyone can join the PGL with either a subscription to TEN or a \$9.95 seasonal entry fee.

In the PGL’s first season, Quake and Command & Conquer: Red Alert were the



The competitors prepare for battle.

featured games, and the 16 highest-ranked players at the end of the three months received plane tickets to Seattle to play for the money.

The PGL boasted a combined purse of \$250,000 in cash and prizes, but the emphasis is on “and prizes,” with the total cash purse amounting to roughly \$30,000. Still, that’s not bad money for 16 players who, on average, have yet to graduate from college.

Pay for play

Earning money by playing computer games isn’t new—cash-competitive LAN tournaments have been with us for a long time—but imposing a very structured, organized, system-



Thresh (under the boom mike) gets lost in a media crush.

atic competitive league where qualifying and elimination rounds are played over the Internet is very new.

The pro-gaming organizations have taken the natural clubby, self-organizing atmosphere of online gaming and put a different (but time-tested) spin on it: Tomorrow’s pro-gaming leagues will be organized and operated much along the lines of real-world pro sports. It’s an audacious leap, to say the least.

The PGL isn’t the only place where professional gaming is being explored. Revenue from Internet gaming remains elusive, and TEN’s competitors are laying the groundwork for their own pro leagues.

Mplayer is planning to expand into this arena by growing its popular Quake tournaments into a cash-competitive systematic league. The Cyberathletes Organization began signing some of the Net’s best players to exclusive contracts and organizing LAN-based tournaments late last year.

Whether the phenomenon will catch a popular zeitgeist is becoming a multimillion-dollar question. Will spectators eventually be willing to pay money to watch computer games played at the highest level of competition? Can marketing people spin mild-mannered, bespectacled 20-year-olds into national celebrities? When they talk about the computer revolution, this steps up as one of the revolution’s more intriguing skirmishes.

PGL SEASON 1 RESULTS

Quake Champion: Thresh

2nd Place: Reptile

Red Alert Champion: DeepBlue

2nd Place: Soljah

1ST PLACE PRIZES

- \$7,500
- AMD-K6 machine
- Outlaw 3D Graphics Card from Jazz Multimedia
- U.S. Robotics x2 56Kbps modem
- Logitech controller
- Cambridge SoundWorks/Creative Labs MicroWorks speakers
- One pair of Dockers Authentic Flat-Front Khakis

2ND PLACE PRIZES

- \$4,000
- AMD-K6 machine
- Outlaw 3D Graphics Card from Jazz Multimedia
- Assorted other prizes

Register and get PGL coverage at www.pgl.com. Gamers Extreme (www.gamers.com) also has PGL coverage—including demos of all the Quake matches, which you can download and watch.

Tomorrow's stars?

It's a curious celebrity that's produced by computer gaming. Instead of the heroic, strapping jock warriors of big-league sports, you end up with less-than-intimidating college-age guys (or younger) who don't seem like they would hurt a fly.

That is, until you're sitting across a LAN from them.

The champion of the Red Alert tournament was the lanky, self-assured David Magro, who plays under the daunting screen name DeepBlue. He spent the tourney dismantling opponents in four-way play with lightning-fast and creative attacks.

Magro also demonstrated what was a surprisingly common trait among the PGL's finalists—a handy interviewing ability.

After he won his semifinal match, a TV camera, light, and microphone were immediately in his face. A reporter was firing off questions. Magro genially smiled and responded as if he'd been granting post-match interviews for years, offering the same boilerplate responses as any big-league athlete. Example: "Yeah, I was in



Reptile (foreground) took damage but zapped Thresh to tie the score at 6-6 in the quarterfinal.



This kill electrified the crowd and gave Reptile a 7-6 lead. He won the quarterfinal 10-7.

trouble for a little while there when I lost that power plant, but I made a pretty good recovery and got back in there."

There could really be something to pro gaming. Its competitors are already talking like pros. The question is, Does this make for the kind of stuff that kids want to see on trading cards? Don't laugh—the cards already exist.

The Future, coming soon

There is, shall we say, some skepticism about the prospect of pro gaming as viable entertainment. Some gamers don't get what the fuss is all about. Among them is Matt Ferry, a Quake aficionado who frequents Quake chat rooms under the screen name DarkIdol.

"I used to play on TEN but don't anymore," he says. "This PGL stuff is just another way for them to get ten bucks out of people."

Other gamers see some value. "I'd love watching all the best guys play," says Kevin Craig, an online gamer who's played on both TEN and Mplayer. "I'm not that good, but if they can make money doing it, that's cool."

Chris Holden, the head of Kesmai's newly launched GameStorm service, pulls few punches in his assessment of TEN's new project.

"I have to hand it to TEN for pulling it all together," he prefaces. "But I really don't think pro leagues are where gaming needs to go."

GameStorm's vision for online gaming is centered around a more social, less ultracompetitive club atmosphere.

"We want to be inclusive, especially in light of the fact that we're appealing to a

mass market, a truly mass market beyond the core gaming audience," Holden says. "The way to broaden the appeal of gaming is to set up a friendly, social atmosphere where people can just get together and play, without money being a part of it."

Holden sees the PGL as doing more harm than good to the growth of online gaming as a national phenomenon. He fears that by narrowing the appeal of gaming to a smaller and smaller group of more hardcore gamers, the companies may end up neglecting a mass market of prospective customers.

Such doubts aren't keeping the PGL's organizers from dreaming big. They say the TEN service itself offers the social atmosphere Holden speaks of, and once folks



have a taste of it, surely they'll want to see how the best in the world play. The plan is to continue holding a championship event at the conclusion of each three-month season. (GameWorks' many national locations will



The first of Thresh and Reptile's finals matches featured some excellent rocket battles.



Thresh's rocket connects for a kill in the first finals match. He beat Reptile 5-1.



The second finals match featured lots of lightning gun-action.

figure into these events, though the May championship will be held in Atlanta at the next Electronic Entertainment Expo.)

Chouteau says the PGL is looking into all kinds of ways to enhance and promote the PGL experience.

"A big concern is how to present each player's perspective in a more dynamic way," he says, noting that it's difficult to balance the live presentation of the game's sights and sounds with the practical concerns of balanced play, especially with strategy games.

"We want to provide the very helpful play-by-play and color commentary, which help new spectators understand what's going on—and at the same time not tip off players as to what's going on."

The league toyed with the idea of putting players in isolation booths so that commentators could talk at will while spectators watched the action on big screens. But the interest in player exposure, and the value of having spectators in such close proximity to the players, will probably mean another solution is in order.

The event itself offered a surprising amount of viewer involvement, given the passive, virtual nature of the competition. The ring was centered on four PCs hooked up by LAN, one monitor facing outward at each compass-point of the circle. The crowd surrounded the ring's barricade and had a view of the nearest player's monitor. Or, looking skyward, you could follow the action from any player's perspective on one of the overhead monitors.

Emcees provided play-by-play and color commentary, which, in the Quake

deathmatches, led to such exchanges as:

A: "He's trapped in the one dead-end on this level. What's the strategy now?"

B: "Well, he'll be patient and wait him out, trying to angle some grenades around that corner."

A: "Oh!!! And he got him! Oh!!! And an unlucky respawn costs him!"

B: "Yes, you're at the mercy of the re-

spawn, and since you emerge without weapons, your opponent is obviously going to take advantage and press the situation."

It was all a little surreal, but the fans seemed into it—cheering, analyzing, rooting, groaning. Admittedly, it was much more fun and entertaining than I anticipated—and

TEN insists it's just going to get better.

Immediate plans include establishing a six-month season for clan play, allowing as many as 64 pro clans to compete in a regular season, then having the best of them go at it in person. The logistics of such a league, given the number of people needed for matches, is daunting. But it is up and running for season two.

Beyond that, the PGL's plans enter the sublime. Chouteau outlines a vision of grandstands filled with spectators at large PGL championship events and, in what is perhaps the league's most poignantly hopeful notion, the idea of starting a rotisserie fantasy league based on PGL players' performances.

Well, nobody who ever dreamed small built much of anything, right?

Show me the money

There's nothing new about gaming services looking for the next big way to make a buck—TEN and almost every other online-gaming service have had several rounds of layoffs while struggling to find a revenue model that works. First it was subscriptions, now it's migrating to an advertising-based model, and venture-capital money has been a constant (TEN recently announced \$8 million in new financing). Perhaps pro leagues are next. Major companies have already pitched in more than \$2 million for PGL tourney administration, equipment, and, of course, prizes. So even though its attempts at media spin may sound a bit hollow and its motivations may be a little less than altruistic, there is undeniably something noteworthy going on within the infant Professional Gamers' League.

The spotlight is on gamers, for a change. Sitting across from each other in that death-match ring are two kids just like us, except they're way better at Quake or Red Alert. They've been flown out to a vibrant, buzzing



Dennis Fong (aka Thresh) gets his check from Joe Perez (right), director of league operations.



Jim Dangcil (aka Reptile) holds up the second-place trophy.

amusement center in downtown Seattle, access badges are draped around their necks, and newspapers and Web sites and TV stations from around the country want to talk to them—oh yeah, and they're getting paid for this.

Throughout the tournament, Thresh was decked out in Microsoft duds, having just inked an endorsement with the company. And



Thresh still managed to bust out the RL now and again.



This kill gave Thresh a 3-2 lead in the second finals match.



Another zap and Thresh is up 4-2. He won the second finals match 5-2.

of course, Thresh used Microsoft gear in the tourney. Instead of "Be Like Mike," maybe his slogan can be "Thrash Like Thresh."

When he took the microphone to make his concise victory speech after winning the Quake tourney, he made sure to thank his sponsors. "I want to thank Microsoft for their support," he said before being shushed—Logitech is one of the PGL's sponsors.

Thresh is the first boy wonder of pro gaming, but he's not the only guy using his status to capitalize on endorsement opportunities.

A New Jersey teenager named Ash Hitchon, aka Unabomber1, accepted an endorsement

proposal made during the event by the CEO of a Moorestown, New Jersey, reseller called RE/COM. Hitchon gets a T1 home connection and other unspecified support in exchange for his endorsement, which should include his playing under the screen name—you guessed it—RE/COM.

In another noteworthy development, the backlash against gaming-pro celebrity is already well underway. Thresh, who is part-owner of PGL contractor Gamers Extreme, became the target of a sly (and absolutely sincere) conflict-of-interest questioning by a selective emailer called the Gaming Ghost. Gaming media got to chuckle at the Ghost's Mencken-style questions about the "impropriety" of Thresh competing when his venture is part of the event's officiating body.

It was certainly instructive. A Planet Quake forum filled with threads as gamers from around the world posted their opinions on

Tour Pro (www.easports.com) offered a total of \$60,000 in cash and prizes in 1997—and the purse will be bigger in 1998, the company says.

"EA is committed to the idea of cyberathletes, people who make a living playing computer games," says spokeswoman Kathy Frazier.



Brian Holzberger (right) won EA's first PGA Tour Pro.

The company hosted its first championship last November at Sawgrass in Houston, where Brian Holzberger birdied the first hole in the sudden-death playoff and pocketed the \$10,000 winner's check. In January, the company hosted the finals of the International Invitational, a tourney that featured online qualifying rounds. The top four virtual golfers—from Sweden, Canada, Mexico, and New Zealand—were flown to Pebble Beach for the finals, which saw Mexico's Andres Platonoff birdy the first hole in a sudden-death playoff to score the \$2,500 first prize. While the company gears up for the 1998 PGA Tour Pro, it's hosting weekly tournaments.

And despite Holden's concerns that leagues aren't good for gaming, his GameStorm service is prepping for the Jack Nicklaus Online Tour (www.gamestorm.com/sports), which will offer a cash purse. The champion may also win a round of golf with the Golden Bear himself.

It's either a bold new frontier—grandstands, rotisserie leagues, endorsements, and all—or else it's just going to be a great story they tell their grandkids someday.

THE SPONSOR PARADE

The PGL boasts the support of some big-league sponsors. They've already ponied up more than \$2 million in cash and prizes to be named the "official" this or that and have their logos on Web pages, T-shirts, and banners hanging at the championships. AMD kicked in the most money—notice that the league's full name is The AMD Professional Gamers' League. Here are some of the "officials":

- Dockers – Official Apparel
- Sheraton Hotels – Official Hotel
- AMD – Official Processor
- U.S. Robotics – Official Modem
- AT&T WorldNet – Official ISP
- GTE – Official Networking
- Creative – Official Speakers and DVD
- Rendition – Official Graphics Technology
- Jazz Multimedia – Official Graphics Card
- Logitech – Official Game Controllers



The champion of GameStorm's Jack Nicklaus Online Tour could get a crack at the Golden Bear in person.

what some termed "Threshgate." At least people out there take the PGL seriously enough to ask probing questions about its players and the organization. You know what they say about no press being bad press.

On course

But the pay-for-play trend isn't limited to the PGL, which is a sign that pro gaming may be more than a passing fad. Electronic Arts' PGA

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3D Performance Comparison - ZD 3D Winbench '98

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4MB AGP	532
8MB PCI	516
4MB PCI	468
STB Velocity 128 PCI	458
Diamond Viper 330 PCI	438
Diamond Monster 3D PCI	385
Hercules Stringray 128 PCI	375
Matrox Mystique 220 + Matrox M3D PCI	252
Matrox Millennium II PCI	91.7
Creative Labs Graphics Blaster PCI	72.2

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Hundreds of worlds beckon, 24 hours a day

By Barry Brenesal

It's more interactive and exciting than television. It's got better opponents than standalone games. No, it isn't Olympic Beach Volleyball—it's multiplayer online gaming. And you don't have to be a pro to experience its fun and excitement. It's rescuing a buddy under attack by powerful spells and weapons in GemStone III. It's the thrill of a crypt battle in Diablo, where your foes aren't just the skeletons you're killing left and right but also the living person sneaking up on your unprotected back. It's using the Death Grip Force Power and the lightsaber to score the winning frag in Jedi.

There's no adrenaline rush like playing with and against other people rather than computer AI. And if you haven't tried it before, there's no better time than the present. You needn't be a technical wizard to get up and running. In fact, you don't even need to break out in a sweat.



A bloody battle in Myth.

The costs of online gaming

We wouldn't be honest if we told you that online gaming can be done on the cheap.

You can't play standalone Dungeon Keeper or Quake II effectively on a slow 486, right? Well, multiplayer games on the Internet are that much more resource-intensive. In effect, you're running or connecting with up to three CPU-draining programs at once: communications software, the game client on your computer, and the main game on the host's server.

Bluntly put, you can't be serious about beating the pink stuffing out of the online competition if they have the processing power and connection speed while you're barely chugging along.

You, my friend, need a powerful CPU to play effectively online and enjoy the experience. Nothing less than a Pentium 100 will do, and if you're in the market for a new PC, buy nothing

less than a P200. It's worth the cost for the extra code-crunching force it provides.

As far as memory is concerned, let your rule be to buy as much as your CPU can effectively harness and your wallet can afford. Games that require 16MB of RAM are common now, so that should be your minimum; and we're already starting to see games with 32MB RAM requirements.

Your modem is just as important. The minimum is a 28.8 modem, which transfers data at 28.8 kilobits per second (Kbps). That lets you, for example, download 1MB of data in about two minutes. These days, 56K modems, like those from



VR-1's SARAC provides a combination of resource management, exploration, and dogfights—all on an oceanic planet.

U.S. Robotics and Motorola, are pretty common and not that much more expensive. If you plan on playing a lot of games that rely on fast reactions, like Quake II or Jedi Knight, get a fast modem.

A good video card is also essential for multiplayer games. Reviewers and players have justly praised the RIVA 128V 3D chipset this past year. I've observed three implementations of this—Diamond's Viper V330, Canopus' Total 3D 128V, and STB's Velocity—at various conventions and displays, and I can recommend all three cards.

Getting connected

If you want to play multiplayer, you've got to get a good connection to the Internet. And while America Online or Microsoft Network might be OK for some games (like cards or text-based adventures), the majority of online gaming today requires you get an Internet service provider.

Many ISPs have streamlined the process to nothing more than answering a few simple questions after starting up some software. (Looking for a provider? We've had good luck with MindSpring and WorldNet. Also, check your Yellow Pages. Expect to spend no more than \$20 per month for unlimited access.) You still need to choose a password and find a local-access phone number for your provider, but that's about as difficult as finding a programmer in Seattle.

There's more good news. You don't need to worry about ongoing costs once you've assembled a sufficiently buffed system and have an ISP. There are tons of places to play for free, and the days of extremely high access-fees for online gaming have long departed in the wake of increased competition for your multiplayer dollars. Many online-game services that used to charge (like Mplayer) no longer do. Others, such as TEN, don't charge for certain games, while they still do for others. Even those that still charge for all content have a nominal rate.

I'm on the Web: What next?

Well, pal, you've just opened the door to the candy store, and the stuff inside isn't even fattening. You're going to find games on the Internet in every genre you can imagine: turn-based strategy games like Master of Orion II and UltraCorps, action-packed first-person shooters like Jedi Knight and Quake II, real-time strategy masterpieces like Total Annihilation and Red Alert. There are always a few dozen players eager to beat the shorts off you in Chessmaster 5500, and there are undead roaming through the medieval world of DragonRealms who'd dearly like a blood transfusion of four or five quick pints. Or maybe you'd prefer to program sections of a universe yourself? Or learn how to program? Or just take a break from your job or school and chat with an elf in Norway or a pretty sprite from Quebec?

No matter what your gaming taste, there's something for you. Check the *PC Games* Web site at www.pcgames.com/newbguide for all the wonderful details. And have a great time. ■



Meridian 59's main screen combines information with colorful, animated world views.

Online Multiplayer Glossary

"Wtf? Llama newb said I was using a bot just cuz I gibbed him 40 times!" Huh? Venturing into an online chat room can feel like walking into a foreign land. The following is some frequently used online shorthand—here's hoping it won't feel like it's all Greek when you hit the Net.

AFK: Away from keyboard.

AFKFAM/S: Away from keyboard for a minute/second.

Bot: A cheat program in Quake.

BRB: Be right back.

BTW: By the way. And that's not just IMHO, either.

Camper: In first-person shooters, one who hides near a coveted item or well-traveled area to score frags.

Clan: A group of people who team up to do battle against another group. Also known as guild, order, squadron, or battalion, depending on the genre's preferred term. (See this month's "Guilds" feature.)

Emoticons: Little symbols used to convey emotion in chat text. For instance, :) is a smile and :-D is a big smile and ;) is a wink, while :O conveys surprise. They get a lot fancier, like <:-) as well. Confused? Turn the page right 90 degrees.

Frag: To kill someone in a shooter. Also used as a point system, as in "I had 20 frags, he had 14."

Furry games: A popular subset of MUDs where players assume the roles of anthropomorphized animals.

<g>: Grin, as in "Oh yeah, I got soooo lucky in that game <g>." Angle brackets are often used to indicate actions by the person speaking. For instance, you might see "<shaking> Yikes I'm scared" in a chat room.

Gamemasters: The online equivalent of dungeonmasters. They administer the games.

Gib: The way bodies explode all over the place when hit with a rocket or grenade, as in "Whoa, nasty gib!" (Mostly a Quake-specific term.)

IMHO: In my humble opinion. BTW, it's also IMO when the person's not so humble.

Lag, or Fog: The gamer receives and transmits data at a slow rate because of connection problems. This can be a nuisance at any time, but in online combat, it can be lethal.

Lamer: The opposite of "gamer"; a no-skill twit who uses questionable or unsporting tactics.

Llama: Same as Lamer.

LOL: Laughing out loud.

MUD: Multi-User Dimension (or Dungeon). All other, similar acronyms (MUSH, MOO, MUCK, etc.) are fancy variants, both in name and programming code.

Newbie, or newb: A player who's new to a particular gaming universe.

OOC: Out of character. Some gaming environments reward players who stay consistently IC (in character) and may warn or penalize those who go OOC repeatedly.

PK: Player-Killer. (1) In some games, a room or area that will kill a player or prevent resurrection. (2) A person who enjoys attacking and killing other players.

PvP: Player vs. Player. Some role-playing games permit players to kill one another.

RL: Real Life. A place where people remain glued to their television sets instead of inside a computer. Also IRL (in real life).

ROFL/ROTFL/ROTFLMAO: Rolling on the floor, laughing my ass off.

RPers: Role-players. Players who enjoy assuming a different persona from their RL one in an online game.

Scrolling: Repeating an action or comment in a chat room to the point of annoyance. Other information tends to get lost in the scroll; hence the term.

Shouting: Typing in capital letters or the redundant use of punctuation. "STOP MOVING." "Why are you shouting????!?" Avoid to stay in the bounds of netiquette.

Snert: A player whose main motivation is upsetting other players. When faced with one of these, keep your cool. IRL he probably works for McDonald's and studies acne at high school.

System Abuse: Circumventing the internal rules of a gaming environment through bugs or unallowable procedures. Example: If a player leaves the game environment to avoid dying in legal combat with another player, this may be viewed by the game administrators as system abuse.

Trainer: A cheat program in RPGs and real-time strategy games like Total Annihilation.

WTF: What the F? As in, "I was just about to frag the guy when the game froze—wtf happened?"



You will have a plan.

You will be right.

You will be wrong.

You will love your troops.

You will curse their names.

You will hesitate.

You will panic.

You will attempt the impossible.

You will pull it off.

You will respect your enemy.

You will pay the price.

You will be defeated.

You will face your fear.

You will act on instinct.

You will be exalted.

You will ask for a second chance.

You will know what it is to command.

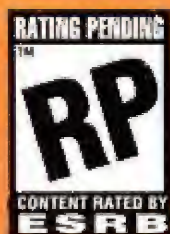
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You will know what it is to command.



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Guild Trip

It's become the way to play—as more games move online, more gamers follow them. PC Games looks at the explosive growth of online guilds and clans. The star of the screen is you, your co-stars might be across the street or across the globe, and the only prediction for the future is that the future is online...

Formative experiences in the development of a lifelong gamer: A small group of friends would gather chairs around a single humming PC. Whether the game was Wizardry or Ultima IV or you name it, there'd be one character in the onscreen party for each of us huddled in front of the monitor. It was a very organized ritual, actually, repeated with each new purchase (we'd all chip in for the games)—each of us would take a turn at the keyboard to create a character, gleefully tweaking attributes and equipment until we were satisfied.

Once the party was to our liking, we'd set off into the game's adventure, steered by Josh (it was his computer, after all) but together as a team, four pairs of eyes watching the screen, digesting the menus, thrilling to the combat. A roar of triumph when our characters advanced a level. Rapid assurances that we'd revive a fallen comrade, whose creator would be watching the action just a little more nervously now that his alter ego was a corpse.

Upon completion of the quest, we'd have a collective celebration—and a victory to be recounted years later over pizza, with the names of long-retired paladins and clerics still fresh, the stories never fading.

I was a member of a guild long before I heard a modem screech for the first time.

Fellow travelers

The draw of online gaming isn't a mystery anymore. Many of us were hooked in one simple but epiphanal moment: the first time

we settled in at a PC, went online, and realized we were playing with live human beings.

"After that," says Michael Do, a current UO junkie, "there's no turning back. Playing against the computer is just playing against the computer."

And being social creatures, we like to feel like we're a part of something—like we belong. It's only natural that we club up in organized clumps to tackle the brave new world of Internet gaming. The Net just expands our pool of potential buddies to...well, to a whole lot of people. We still have that simple desire to play with the neighborhood kids—it's just that the neighborhood's gone global.

"Now, with Ultima Online, I have people to role-play with all the time," says Do, who started with pencil-and-paper RPGs, then moved to PC versions, then to online versions, and is now a member of a UO guild called Moments of Insanity. "Being in a guild gives me people to share the whole thing with. It's not much different from old RPGs, except the gamers are from all over the place, and we meet to play online."

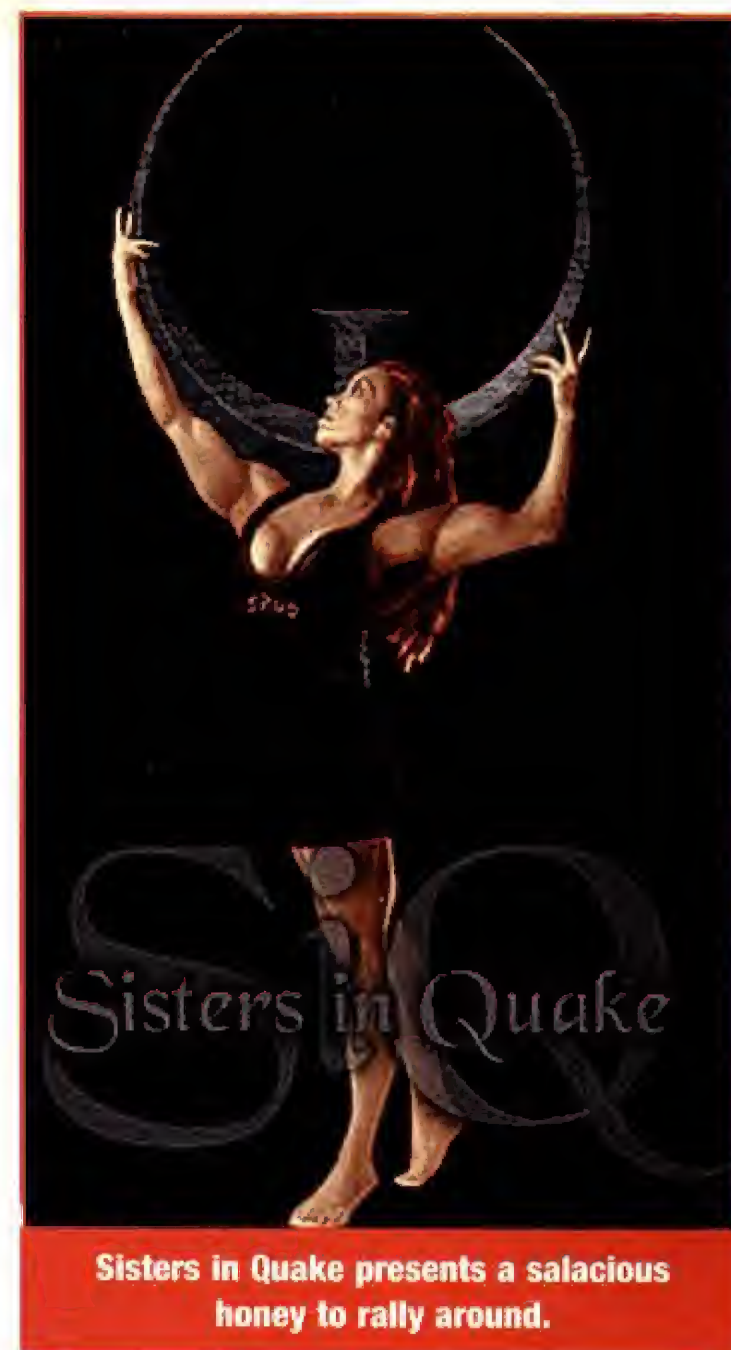
Groups like the Vicious Vikings, a Scandinavian Quake clan, highlight guilds' international nature. "Since most of us are Norwegian, the clan also works as a meeting place, with a large social element," says the Vikings' leader, Kjell Erichsen. "We're a bunch of people who get to know each other rather well, and we talk to each other just about every day on our IRC channel."

Clan Screaming Vengeance is a good microcosm of the current clan/guild experience. The Quake clan's principal attraction, says member Nelson Highfield, is "camaraderie." Composed of members throughout the US, CSV holds practices, forms combat strategies, and recruits new members from its Web site while fielding challenges from all comers.

Brian Harbaugh is the clan's leader. "Why does someone join a baseball team? Why does someone join a soccer team? A clan is simply the gaming equivalent of a sports team."

By Daniel Morris

The Little League of the future? Maybe so. Name a popular game with an online component in any genre, and there's likely a guild, clan, order, or squadron for it. Quake widely popularized the practice; now there are groups dedicated to Myth, Jedi Knight, Ultima Online, WarBirds, Outlaws, I-76, MechWarrior, Confirmed Kill, Dark Sun, and on and on.



Guilds and clans spring up with the reckless glee with which children patch together tree houses and cardboard fortresses. Except now, secret handshakes have been supplanted by digital passwords—and instead of snowballs, we throw grenades.

Gather 'round

The origins of online guilds are as varied as their names and banners—some are meticulously assembled by committed diehard enthusiasts, some are cobbled together from



Clan Snarling Badger logo

the chaos of the Web, and still others are magical creations of fate, mirth, or malice.

Sisters in Quake was created, as the name would imply, along gender lines. It has members from around the world, says leader Loco-SQ.

Clan Snarling Badger was formed when

Stop By and Say Hi

Interested in learning more about a clan we mentioned? Here are their URLs:

Britannian Thespians League
www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/5604/thespian.html

Clan Screaming Vengeance
www.gamingx.com/sv

Clan Snarling Badger
www.clan.snarlingbadger.com

Four Horsemen
www.imperium.net/~harkless

Jedi Masters
members.aol.com/jmalliance

Kindred
members.tripod.com/~grayarea/vamp.html

Lethal Edge Gang
www.w-link.net/~mich

Moments of Insanity
members.tripod.com/~mdo/moi.html

Scottish Republican Army
www1.hcis.net/users/toxic/clan/clan.html

Seekers of Orenda
www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Castle/8646/

Signs of Death
www.diediedie.com/sod

Sisters in Quake
www.ts.umu.se/~hd/quake/siq

Tech's Revenge
iquake.cts.com

Vicious Vikings
home.sn.no/~kjellloe/vikings.html

Adam Loper of Wisconsin used a section of his tabletop-game company's server to host a new Quake clan, co-opting Snarling Badger Games' logo as the clan's symbol. CSB eventually decided to set up its own server.

"One of the most important things the server did for the clan was to make people aware of us," writes Loper. "The server's become a proving ground for new members; soon we'll have a lot more people joining us."

Some benefits of guild/clan play are self-evident—camaraderie and competition. In the case of your average Quake clan, players of different skills and specialties often find their competitive experience heightened by the advantage of a balanced unit. After all, it's always more fun when you're winning, right?

"You have to give a team-feel to the game, yet still allow each player a certain level of individuality," suggests Harbaugh.

Many Quake clans actively advertise for specialized players, especially if they play a lot of Capture the Flag or Team Fortress (two Quake mods). A TF clan that finds itself the frequent victim of ambushes might be shopping around for an experienced Scout, while a chronically outgunned group might seek the services of a Soldier with a high-volume killing potential.



The Lethal Edge Gang Outlaws posse pays homage to its forefathers.



The added fun of diverse contributors carries even more weight in the RPG world, where guilds hope to recruit player-characters of classes or skill types the guild needs.

The result is a kind of free market for avatars, where experienced players can often find a welcoming home for an established character, and newbies can gain entry to a guild by offering a needed component to its roster. As a result, most guilds and clans are assembled in the slapdash tradition of kickball side-choosing. Many of the more competitive clans require tryouts, often consisting of challenges against established members. You prevail, you're accepted. RPG guilds occasionally adopt this gauntlet-throwing system, as exemplified by the UO guilds that arrange for challengers to meet members online for a little mano-a-mano.

Other guilds are formed purely out of inspired role-playing fancies. The Britannian Thespians League fights no wars and makes no alliances—its immediate goal is simply to stage a production of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. The guild auditions aspiring actors



and rehearses and performs the play while other guilds slay dragons or wage blood vendettas. The Scottish Republican Army takes a nationalist stance against England while arranging for Quake deathmatches, and SirCaleb's Jedi Masters catalogues the clan's members in a parade of intimidating screenshots.

The beauty of the guild experience is the diversity of play styles it reflects—from the hardhearted to the hilarious.

Tech's Revenge is a Quake clan devoted to the frustrations of tech-support personnel. Its Web page opens with this memorable poem: *Out you demons of stupidity! / Stop calling me*



The Four Horsemen's symbol

to express your invalidity! / For when you call, / My skin begins to crawl, / And all my co-workers pity me. TR leader Christopher Kirkman's designs include, naturally, a Dilbert skin (see previous page).

Over in the Wild West, the Outlaws posse Lethal Edge Gang posts "Wanted" signs for its members. "A sense of humor is a must," says Mike McCoy, the posse's ringleader. "The top priority is that everyone leaves feeling good about themselves."

Meet the big, bad world...

Guilds and clans are constant works in progress, but it's never long after a group's formation that its members introduce themselves to the big, bad world.

"I remember the first match we had against Clan G.o.D. We went in, crushed them, and met afterward on ICQ to talk about the game," Harbaugh recalls. "It's much like a football player does after a victorious football game. I suppose for me, as the leader, it was even more thrilling, because I finally got to see my clan perform together."

The better-organized clans hold routine (often mandatory) practice sessions internally, keeping members' games in tune and working out the group's play-style kinks.

Many guilds use the Web as their primary internal communications system, so their Web sites become a one-stop community center, hangout, and training ground. Bulletin boards announce guild-meeting schedules, and incoming challenges from rival clans are tracked and organized by dedicated clan leaders.

The club atmosphere can sometimes be represented literally, as it is with the MechWarrior 2 clan Four Horsemen. Its leader, Mack, maintains an Officer's Club where members can get news and hear rants from

the boss. The entire site is laid out very cleverly as a visit to the clan dropship.

Whatever the clan, there are logos to create and Web pages to maintain. It all adds up to a lot of housekeeping—which leads to an interesting question: At what point does a guild become, well, a second job?

Some people, like Canadian Nelson Highfield, are bona fide addicts: he estimates he spends 40 hours a week playing. Screaming Vengeance chief Harbaugh estimates his weekly investment in clan-related online play at 15 hours, plus about 30 minutes a day devoted to maintaining the Web site.

Steve St. Clair of the Seekers of Orenda, a Team Fortress Quake clan, began his online journey with Doom II and now spends 15 to 20 hours a week gaming online with his clan. "We are very organized—we're always on a schedule," he notes.



Find a Clan, Order, Guild, Squadron, Legion...

Name your game, and there's likely a clan (or whatever the genre's preferred term) for it. Following are some of our favorite Web rings, where you can find links to existing clans or register your own. For tons of game-related Web-ring listings, visit RingWorld at www.webring.org/ringworld/comp/games.html.

The American Vigilante Association
(I-76 League, with links to "chapters")
home.san.rr.com/som/ava/

Outlaws Web Ring
www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/2963/ring.html

The Diablo and UO Guild Ring
www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Castle/5288/

Quake Clanring
www.mpog.com/clanring/

The EarthSiege Web Ring
www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Castle/8911/

Quake Capture the Flag Webring
www.skull-dragoons.com/ctfring/

Jedi Knight Order Ring
jedi.questgate.net/ring/

Quake Players Web Ring
www.beaconcg.com/dlos/ring.htm

Mechwarrior II Web
Ringwww.pagesz.net/~ben/

Starfleet Academy Web Ring
209.27.235.186/webring/index.htm

Meridian 59 Web Ring
members.tripod.com/~Psiren/mring/ringhome.html

Shadow Warrior Web Ring
www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/2958/swww.html

Myth Web Ring
www.webring.org/cgi-bin/webring?ring=mythorder;list

Total Annihilation Web Ring
www.onr.com/user/jym/index.html

WarBirds Web Ring
www-mac.kth.se/user/westlund/wb/ring/

REMEMBER HOW THEY SAID:

TECHNOLOGY WOULD TAKE WARFARE
OUT OF THE TRENCHES?



THEY WERE WRONG.

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The Kindred clan role-plays vampires in Meridian 59.

Not surprisingly, Fridays and Saturdays are the most fevered days. "Granted, I spend more time on the weekends, but it's an everyday job," writes Harbaugh about organizing Clan Screaming Vengeance.

One might quickly discern a contrast between a certain, shall we say, militaristic type of clan and the more laid-back type. Harbaugh responds: "Our clan was basically formed to have fun. Some clans are so strict, it seems more like a job than a game. While I try to keep things organized and our clan ready to kill, I'm not going to make you drop and give me 20."



Crucified on a Quake stake at the Sign of Death site. Not that they're trying to intimidate us or anything.

Loper of Clan Snarling Badger puts it forthrightly on his clan's Philosophy page: "Right off the bat, Rule Number One: HAVE FUN! It's a game. Simmer down, take a pill, and shut the hell up."

The future— or is there one?

Online gaming's here to stay, and some think it's going to be a boom market: the interactive Digital Software Association predicts that revenues from online gaming will rise

throughout the coming years to become one of the software industry's biggest revenue sources early in the next century.

But it's still very early in this niche's development. Industry hopefuls are currently experimenting with wildly different pricing schemes. Online-gaming ventures are launching and sputtering without generating the revenues anticipated. Pay-to-play services have switched to advertising-based models that, to many, auger bad times for those trying to make a living selling gamers time in online environments.

Still, for all the strife of the volatile online-gaming market, more and more people are going online every day. And their presence on the rolls of the

wired creates a wide market for interactive online entertainment.

Guilds represent the nascent sophistication of this market. Gamers are so pleased with the rewards of online gaming that they're all too happy to devote large chunks of their weeks to the pursuit of clan glory—this has to be a very encouraging phenomenon to game developers. But that same sophistication can lead to sluggishness in terms of the hobby's expansion; newbies require help to develop into returning, paying customers. When they get PK'd or ignored flat-out, they lose interest, and the market loses yet another potential contributor.

Intelligent game companies will recognize the need to nurture guilds and clans in their naturally occurring habitats. For the most part, gamemakers are already on board this philosophy—most new big releases with online components are ready-made for developing group play in a multiplayer environment.

The future of guilds, of course, is in massive multiplayer environments—everybody's favorite catchphrase. UO represents the first



**A Clan Screaming Vengeance
Pyro leaves bodies in his wake. Just
another day on the server.**

baby steps toward a fully functioning game world where players are free to do more or less whatever their little hearts desire. With guilds working to adopt newbies and show them the ropes, as well as providing players with a theme for their characters' existence and a genuine camaraderie, the future of online gaming is where it belongs—safely in the hands of gamers who are free to pursue their own individually tailored gaming experiences.

Tech's Revenge and the Four Horsemen, the Snarling Badgers and the Jedi Masters, the Britainnian Thespians League and Lethal Edge—together, these guilds represent a dizzying array of gameplay. And before long, they'll be the sources of stories that never fade...no matter how many times they're told in chat rooms the world over.

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CYBERSTORM²

C O R P O R A T E W A R S



Emulation Station

While visiting my folks recently, I was going through serious gaming withdrawal after about two days—no PC meant no Quake II or Total A or Jedi or TRIL. My parents, bless their hearts, suggested I fire up the ol' ColecoVision.

Whoa! Zaxxon. Time Pilot. Venture. Turbo. I had forgotten how much these games rocked. It was a refreshing blast from the past.

I got back home and a buddy of mine said, "Dude, don't you have the emulators?" Well, duh! He booted up his PC and a few minutes later I was up to my ears in classic console and arcade games. Sure, some of them were a tad buggy or lacked sound, but the majority were just as good as I'd remembered and ran very smoothly. Quake, shmake—those little guys in Defender need my help.

If you don't have one of the emulators listed below, you're missing out. The emulators are free. The games are free. But, uhhh, *you* might not be if you download them.

Get a ROM, Go to Jail

I'd first heard about emulators a couple years ago in secret communiqués from people sure that the FBI (or worse, Nintendo) had them under surveillance.

Their paranoia was justified, to a point. The emulators—programs that mimic the hardware of a console or arcade system—appear to be legal. They're merely programs smart guys have written.

What's apparently not legal are the ROMs, the read-only-memory instructions that were burned on the cartridge's chip and are now downloadable from tons of Web sites. But even that's a gray area: You can legally download them if you already own the cartridge or arcade game. (Uhhh, why yes, Officer, I have the Gorf tabletop game in my garage.)

"The FBI won't come knocking on your door," says Kevin "Fragmaster" Bowen, editor of ClassicGaming.com. "And Nintendo hasn't really done too much—they've shut down a few emulator sites and ROM sites. Sega's never done anything."

And Atari and Coleco are out of business—though Telegames, which holds the rights to a handful of ColecoVision games, has sent cease-and-desist letters to Web sites, telling them to pull games.

Insert Coin

So get thee to a Web browser. Before you know it, you'll be experiencing gaming history. Generally, you download and install the emulator for the system you want (you name it and one exists—from Intellivision to arcade classics). Then you find and download/extract the ROMs into the same directory as the emulator. Double-click on the emulator's .exe, load a ROM, and enjoy. Just make sure you own the console, cartridge, and arcade games of choice.

MAME32 (Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator) is a great starting point if you're new to the emulation scene. It's a breeze to use and currently emulates 300 arcade games.

Just don't tell anyone TheWeasel sent you.



Zaxxon on Virtual ColecoVision.



Frogger on MAME32.

Playing a map, mod, or mission that rocks your world? Tell TheWeasel all about it at TheWeasel@pcgames.com.



MAME32 Home Page

www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Lair/8706/mame32.html
Get ROMs at Insert Coin (208.8.142.105/mame/).

Stella (Atari)

www4.ncsu.edu/~bwimott/2600/
A multiplatform Atari 2600 emulator.

Virtual ColecoVision Homepage

www.classicgaming.com/vcolecov
ColEm (www.komkon.org/fms/ColEm/) and AdamEm (www.komkon.org/~dekogelladamem.html) are also popular.

Dark Lord's Emulation Cave

members.aol.com/ShRo0miN/emulation.html
Emulators/ROMs for GameBoy, NES, SNES, Genesis, and more.

ClassicGaming.com

www.classicgaming.com
A great resource for news, features, FAQs, ROMs, and emulators.

Dave's Videogame Classics

www.davesclassics.com/
Awesome. News, emulators, and ROMs for most systems, including MAME.

History of Home Video Games

www.sponsor.net/~gchance/
A must-see. Excellent history of the industry, with FAQs and ROMs.

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By Danny W. Lam

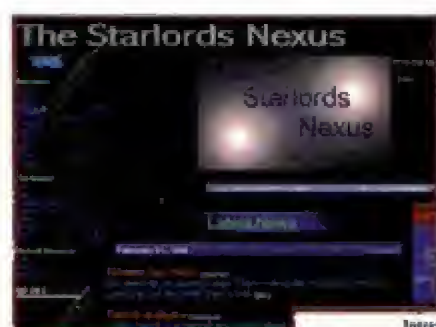


Did you stay up until 2 a.m. buffing up your game site again? If you did, it deserves some attention! We've gone online to pick out the very best in gamers' URLs—the few that stand out among the rest. Here are some of our favorite in-your-face, slammin' Web sites!

The Starlords Nexus

www.zigzag.co.il/USF/clans/Nexus

Check out this Starcraft site—it's got a downloadable unit viewer, movies, music files, patches, strategies, even Win 95 desktop themes! Take the Starlords Pledge and join the clan.



Internet Weather Report

www.internetweather.com

Don't you just hate LAG? This isn't a gaming site, but it's a great resource for every online gamer. It gives you the scoop on which ISP is dropping packets.

ISP	Latency	Throughput	Packet Loss	Round Trip Time
AOL	100ms	100Kbps	0%	100ms
Comcast	100ms	100Kbps	0%	100ms
Earthlink	100ms	100Kbps	0%	100ms
Excite	100ms	100Kbps	0%	100ms
Hotmail	100ms	100Kbps	0%	100ms
MSN	100ms	100Kbps	0%	100ms
Netcom	100ms	100Kbps	0%	100ms
Prodigy	100ms	100Kbps	0%	100ms
SBC	100ms	100Kbps	0%	100ms
Sprint	100ms	100Kbps	0%	100ms
Time Warner	100ms	100Kbps	0%	100ms
Verizon	100ms	100Kbps	0%	100ms
Worldnet	100ms	100Kbps	0%	100ms

Jane's Combat Simulation

www.janes.ea.com

Combat-sim fans: Ignoring this site would be just "plane" silly! Get your fill of .AVI(ation) movies, links, specs, screens, and other stuff from Jane's flight sims.



Zanshin's GLDojo

www.planetquake.com/gldojo/index.html

This page gives you all the dirt on tweaking your system for GLQuake. It offers comparisons of video cards like the Monster 3D and the Intense 3D Voodoo, plus downloadable drivers and more.

Slipgate Central

www.slipgatecentral.com



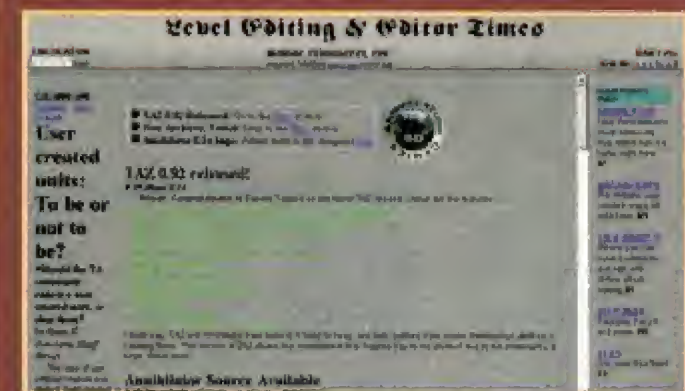
What? You still haven't had enough Quake? Use this page to search for all things Quake-related. From deathmatches to commercials to utilities, this will surely be a bookmark of the very Quaked.

Site of the Month

Annihilated

www.annihilated.com

They bill themselves as the "Number One fan site of Total Annihilation," and you'll get no arguments here! Tons of stuff, including an Arm/Core weapons database, unit-comparison spreadsheets, cheats—almost everything you need to get inside TA is ready to download for your enjoyment. And you have to take a peek at the *Level Editing & Editor Times* newspaper. If it's in TA, it's here!



Does your gaming Web site dominate? Send your URLs to sites@pcgames.com, and you just might see the fruits of your labor bookmarked in an upcoming issue!

Online-Gaming Services

MPG-NET www.mpgn.com

ENGAGE www.gamesonline.com

TEN www.ten.net

Internet Gaming Zone www.zone.com

GameStorm www.gamestorm.com

DWANGO www.dwango.com

HEAT www.heat.net

Mplayer www.mplayer.com

WorldPlay AOL keyword: WorldPlay

2AM www.2am.com

Kali www.kali.com

Kahn www.stargatenetworks.com

Battle.net www.battle.net

Bungie.net www.bungie.net



For games we've rated as an A or A-, admittance to the A-List is the ultimate honor. If it's on this list, it's not just great, it *rocks*. Serious gamers will want all of these titles in their collections.

Civilization II	(June '96)	MicroProse
Close Combat: A Bridge Too Far	(Jan '98)	Microsoft
C&C: Red Alert	(Feb '97)	Westwood Studios
Diablo	(Feb '97)	Blizzard Entertainment
Duke Nukem 3D	(July '96)	GT Interactive
Dungeon Keeper	(Sept '97)	Electronic Arts
FIFA 98	(March '98)	Electronic Arts
Jedi Knight	(Dec '97)	LucasArts
Links LS '98	(Oct '97)	Access Software
Longbow 2	(Feb '98)	Electronic Arts
Master of Orion II	(March '97)	MicroProse
MDK	(May/June '97)	Playmates
Myth	(Feb '98)	Bungie
NHL 98	(Nov '97)	Electronic Arts
Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee	(Feb '98)	GT Interactive
Pro Pinball: Timeshock!	(Sept '97)	Empire Interactive
Quake II	(March '98)	Activision
Total Annihilation	(Dec '97)	GT Interactive
X-COM: Apocalypse	(Oct '97)	MicroProse
Worms 2	(April '98)	MicroProse

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

There aren't many changes to the *PC Games* staff playlist this month—we're still awaiting the *Quake II*— and TA-killers. Next month, maybe...

- **1 Quake II**
- **2 Total Annihilation**
- **3 Jedi Knight: Mysteries of the Sith →**
- **4 FIFA 98: Road to the World Cup**
- **5 Worms 2**



HOW WE RATE GAMES

Here at *PC Games* we use a letter-grade system to rate games. Everyone knows what our grades mean without needing an in-depth explanation or clever chart: an A+ is the best score possible and an F is a complete bust. To give you a better feel for the overall quality of a title, we rate each game in six key areas. We also select a Game of the Month for each issue. We review games when and only when the makers say they're ready for review.

GAME of the MONTH: The *PC Games* Game of the Month is the one title among the month's releases that stands out from the rest. While it's generally the best overall game of the month, a game will occasionally warrant this honor not because it's the highest-rated game in the issue, but because it's a standout in one or more areas.

GAMEPLAY: In a nutshell, how much fun is it to play? This takes into account the quality of the game's interface and control scheme, and is weighted more heavily than other ratings in the overall grade.

GETTING STARTED: How much reading, studying, and hardware-tweaking are required before you can start to have fun? (The less the better.)

GRAPHICS: How advanced and attractive are the game's visual elements, and how well do they serve the game? If a game's 3D-accelerated graphics are significantly different than its standard look, we offer separate grades.

SOUND CHECK: How good are the game's sounds and musical score, and how well do they serve the game?

OVERALL GRADE: All in all, how strongly do we recommend the game for purchase?

MULTIPLAYER: How much value will you get from the game's multiplayer element, if there is one? (N/A = not available) This independent rating takes into account ease of multiplayer setup.

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on the evil priestess who's done you wrong. Because in this cavernous maze of devious traps, it's all about cheating death at every turn, blurring that fine line between pleasure and pain. And just when you think you can't take it anymore, consider the alternative.



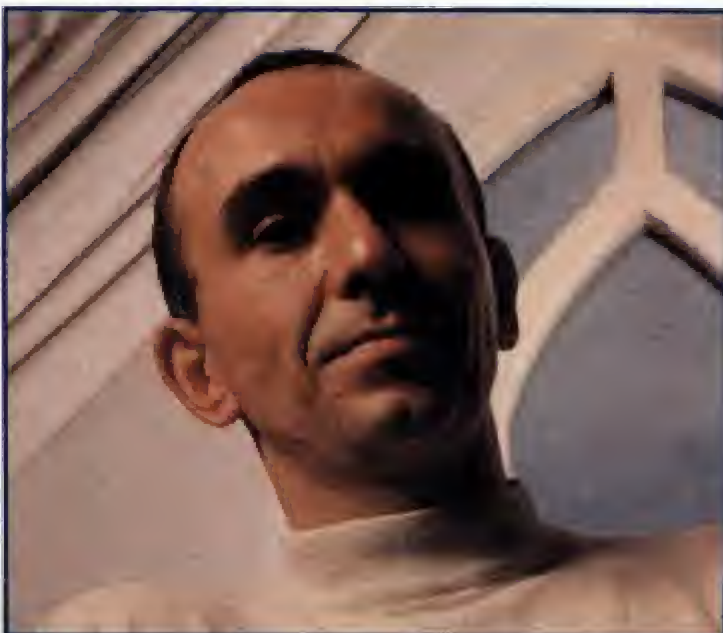
EIDOS
INTERACTIVE

You've been warned.

You followed the development of a game to near completion with our Redline previews. Now we've teamed up with Lionhead Studios, the new home of industry luminary Peter Molyneux, to get the inside scoop on what it's up to.

The Lionhead Diaries

This month we kick off a series of development diaries penned by Steve Jackson, Lionhead director and "biz guy" and a veteran games designer



Peter Molyneux

Molyneux to quit Bullfrog?" This headline in Britain's *Computer Trade Weekly* (July 1996) set the phones ringing like alarm bells. The prospect was inconceivable. The creator of *Populous*, *Powermonger*, *Syndicate*, *Magic Carpet*, and *Theme Park* and the company he founded were synonymous. Could he really be abandoning his baby after 10 years' success? And if so, why?

The timing was unfortunate. *Dungeon Keeper* was nearing completion. Locked away in Peter's home in rural Surrey, the entire team was working 16-hour days, testing and retesting, debugging and redebugging. Eventually, the truth emerged. It was true. Peter was leaving.

In 1995, Bullfrog was sold to Electronic Arts. The price was, as Peter admitted later, "a ridiculous amount of money." He was even featured on the *Sunday Times*' 1997 Rich List (755th, along with Roger "James Bond" Moore, actress Joan Collins, and *Discworld* author Terry Pratchett). But privately, he'd never felt at ease in EA's corporate culture. Endless management meetings and exhausting trips back and forth to California were wearing him down. He simply wanted to get back to his first love—designing games.

I'd first met Peter a couple of years before. His openness and genuine enthusiasm for

games were refreshing. The interview I conducted with him lasted over two hours, with much of the time spent discussing our mutual interest in German board games. We began meeting regularly with four other friends from the industry for Games Nights. These events are still held every fortnight or so and anecdotes from them will no doubt creep into this column from time to time.

One day, some 18 months after our first meeting, Peter confided his plans for the future. He wondered whether I'd be interested in joining his new team. It was an offer I couldn't refuse. After two years as a journalist, I, too, wanted to get back into creating games. There was just one minor drawback: I knew nothing



LIONHEAD

about programming. "That's not a problem," Peter beamed. "It's an asset. Someone has to be the sane member of the team..."

There would be two other directors of the new company. Mark Webley was an easy-to-get-on-with type of bloke with an offbeat sense of humor. Though he hates the analogy, he's like a slimmer version of comedian John Goodman. Whilst at Bullfrog, Mark was something of a rising star. Some even predicted he might be offered Peter's job when he left.

The fourth member of the team was Tim Rance, an ex-systems analyst who had programmed the multiplayer version of *Populous*.

It was one of the first mainstream games ever to offer network play. If Mark is John Goodman, Tim is Data. His knowledge of the technical side of systems is awesome. At our meeting, we talked business: duties, budgets, cash flow, space at the E3 trade show in Atlanta, and how to get Lara Croft in as our receptionist. But the longest discussions of all concerned the company name.

Originally, Peter and Mark had decided on Lionhead—the name of Mark's pet hamster. Unfortunately, the honor proved too much for the poor creature: Lionhead died. This was taken as a dark omen—we should pick another name. A number of possibles came up. Strong contenders were Black Box, Midnight, and Hurricane (Peter's Games Night nickname). But no clear winner emerged. We ended our first board meeting with some table-football and a game of croquet on Peter's new croquet lawn.

A week or so later Peter called. What did I think of Red Eye? It turned out everyone and their uncle had a company called Red Eye. There was a Red Eye Records, Red Eye Productions, you name it. And more importantly, the redeye.co.uk URL was already taken. The name Lionhead had presented none of these problems. Tim had already registered a lionhead.co.uk Web site. And by now, we even had Lionhead business cards. On first impression, Lionhead may conjure up notions of the British lion, the king of the jungle, and similar visions of grandeur. The truth is something quite different.



Steve Jackson

NEXT MONTH: Demis arrives—and Lionhead will never be the same again.



Final Fantasy VII

The console-killer is here



By Nash Werner

As the world celebrated the closing of 1996, something magical was brewing on the streets of Japan. From Okinawa to Hokkaido, the buzz was all about Square Soft's PlayStation epic Final Fantasy VII—the latest installment in one of the most successful role-playing franchises ever.

It was to nobody's surprise when some 500,000 people lined up overnight at their favorite videogame outlets, not wanting to be left out of Square's initial weekend release. FFFVII sales soared throughout its opening weekend, moving 2.3 million copies in just three days—a new PlayStation record.

The English-language version was released in September 1997 and quickly sold out across America as well.

Now, Square and Eidos Interactive are bringing the Final Fantasy experience to PC gamers, an audience that may be unfamiliar with Nihonshiki (Japanese-style) RPGs.

The story starts you off in Midgar, a city ruled by the Shinra Corporation. This shady

Wallace, an elite Avalanche member, gets Cloud caught up in the swirl of rebellion. In helping Avalanche, Cloud learns of Shinra's dastardly plans to tap into the planet's Materia and drain its life force.



At the Gold Saucer, you can gamble away all your credits and still have a great time.

FFVII's graphics engine is a refreshing look at what multiple camera-angles can do for a role-playing game when it's shot from a third-person viewpoint. Entire towns and cities come to life as the camera takes you on a whirlwind of multiple views. One of them is an overhead "wilderness" perspective, which'll give you a blimp-side view of Cloud as you guide him across 3D-rendered landscapes.

The combat engine is easily one of the best-performing of any RPG to date. An adjustable real-time setting is great for adding a sense of drama to engagements. And the summon spells call forth 3D-rendered beasts larger than any monster you've ever seen on the PC.

It's not all combat, though. Over the course of the game, Cloud can take part in various "event games." These include snowboarding, motorcycle races, and arm wrestling, and they add some nice variety to the standard RPG fare.

Due to modern advances in computer graphics and the fact that the average PC has more

than eight times the RAM of a PlayStation, Square decided to redo all the graphics for hardware acceleration and increase the pixel count, improving the overall look.

In a recent visit to Eidos, I almost didn't recognize FFFVII. The amazing graphical backgrounds were cleaned up using an anti-alias format—basically blurring the edges to eliminate thick pixels. The graphics were still rendered beautifully in 16-bit color, but one of the first things you'll notice is the new lighting effects. Sure, the PlayStation has nice lighting, but it's hard to render lighting in real time with less memory than a PC. The FFFVII port was running on a P200 with 32MB of RAM and Direct3D, rendering lighting effects that rival those of the best 3D-accelerated games.

To top it off, the sound has been optimized to support today's most sophisticated sound cards. I heard FFFVII being blasted through a 64-bit sound card—at that moment, I swore I'd never touch my PlayStation again. And if you thought the PlayStation soundtrack was incredible, you haven't heard anything yet.

In essence, FFFVII should be a perfect conversion of the US PlayStation version, including the monsters that differ from the Japanese PlayStation incarnation. The dialogue is, for the most part, being copied over verbatim (to be presented in text form), and the storyline remains untouched. FFFVII promises to deliver what PlayStation gamers have enjoyed for months: one of the best role-playing experiences ever.



Guide Cloud through picturesque mountains and haunted forests.

group is trying to harness the power of ancient artifacts known as Materia. The often fatal results of these experiments have led to the rebel group Avalanche attempting to stop them. Cloud Strife (your character) recently quit Shinra, and an encounter with Barret

FINAL FANTASY VII

DEVELOPER: Square Soft
PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive
WEB: www.eidosinteractive.com
AVAILABLE: June 1998

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for sneak attacks

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3D topography



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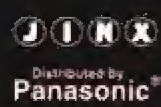
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Tex Murphy: Overseer

3D FMV DVD

By Peter Olafson

GAME OF
THE MONTH

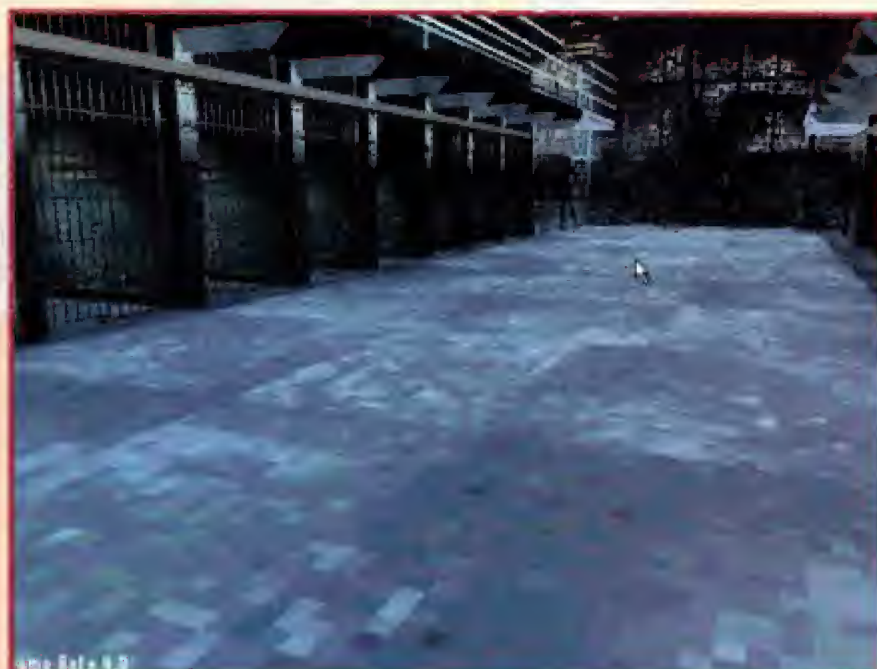


Tex Murphy has always been hard up for cases, but this is ridiculous. For Overseer's plot, Access has gone back nine years to square one: Mean Streets. Back in 1989, Mean Streets broke all kinds of new ground. It was one of the first VGA games; its RealSound system managed to coax amazing effects out of the warbly PC speaker; its built-in flight sim gave the game a sense of process—now a lost art. And it all fit on six low-density 5.25-inch disks. In the language of detective-movie parodies, Mean Streets had legs that went all the way up to its hips.

But in Overseer, the designers have left out a lot of what made the original game fun, and burdened it with superfluous additions.

Coming on five CDs and a single (included) DVD, Overseer transports the plot from the largely 2D Mean Streets into an improved version of the FMV/3D-based system used in 1994's Under a Killing Moon and 1996's The Pandora Directive.

The story, recounted from within the inane narrative frame of a Tex dinner date, finds the hapless 21st-century San Francisco PI investigating scientist Carl Linsky's suicide. Through interviews, aggressive object-grabbing, and puzzle solving, Murphy (codesigner Chris Jones



In San Francisco Bay's island prison, you'll have to dodge the guard droids (upper right).

Many adventures can be finished in a weekend, so the fact that Overseer is big is a definite plus. Access has also cleaned up the ornate interface of Moon and Pandora: Interaction and movement are now blended smoothly—though movement itself was rarely smooth on my P200 MMX—and the controls are neatly tucked away in side pockets.

And while the acting still has odd fits and starts, I took particular pleasure in the performances of supporting players—notably Micaela Nelligan as Linsky's comically flirtatious fiancée Delores Lightbody, Emmett Grennan as a seething mutant, and Henry Darrow as bottled PI Sonny Fletcher. (This edition's affordable big-name actor is Michael York, who appears as a deposed security magnate.)

Overseer maintains the PI feel of following leads and thinking two steps ahead, filtered through that staple of '90s computer-game design: the standalone puzzle. Some are neatly integrated into the game, while others have the effect of turning a dedicated detective story into yet another exercise in puzzles for puzzles' sake.

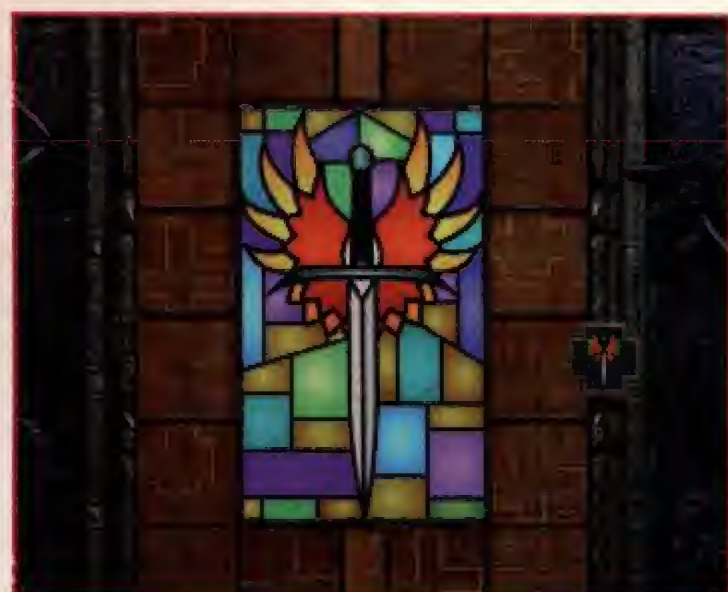
But Mean Streets' travel mode has been discarded in favor of a graphical menu and the odd cut-scene. There are no longer multiple approaches in conversation, and the original game's wealth of loose and dead ends has been left behind, too. (For that matter, Overseer has also abandoned Pandora's multi-threaded approach.)

Action sequences have been cut back, which is odd, since Overseer is at its best when it incorporates that very feature into the adventure—as when Tex tries to search an assassin's apartment without giving himself away, or hides from the droids patrolling Alcatraz. Why have an FMV fistfight when you have a Virtual Tex? Why explore an abandoned building in a filmed sequence when you do it yourself in first person? Isn't it time for this series to move on to something more immersive?

Now, in fairness, if you've been introduced to Tex adventures in recent years and liked what you saw, you may well like this one. But if you're a veteran like me, working from memories of a classic, you may feel disappointed at the opportunities Overseer missed.



The one reminder of Mean Streets in Overseer.

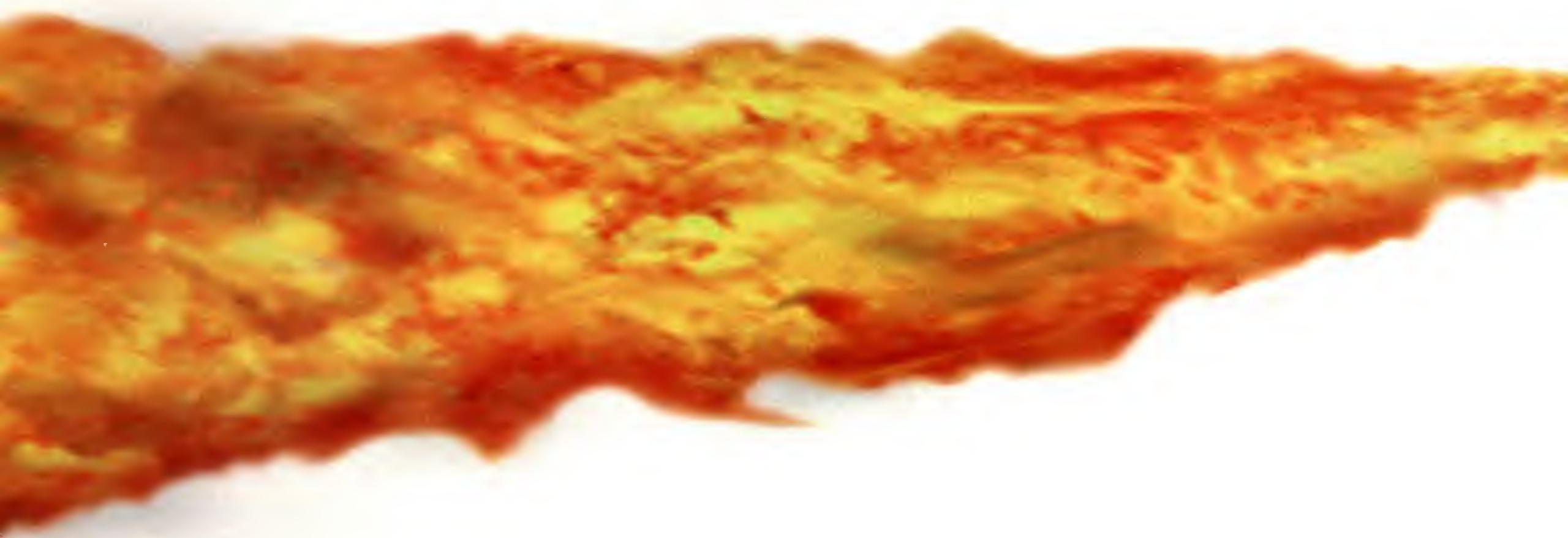


One of the simpler examples of Overseer's standalone puzzles.

reprising his role) establishes that Linsky was involved in a mind-control experiment somehow tied to the agenda of the conservative Law & Order Party.

TEX MURPHY: OVERSEER

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B
B- OVERALL	
MULTIPLAYER: N/A	
A disappointing remake of Mean Streets in 3D and FMV.	
PUBLISHER:	Access Software 800-800-4880
WEB:	www.accesssoftware.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD/DVD
REQUIRES:	P133, 16MB RAM, 35MB HD, 2MB video card, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	PII 233, 32MB RAM, DVD drive, AGP for DVD version
STREET PRICE:	\$50
TIPS ▼ Ehhh, wuddaya-wuddaya! They're available within the game. But this general tip will serve you well: Don't settle for Tex's spoken descriptions. ▼ Examine every item you collect. You never know what you'll find.	



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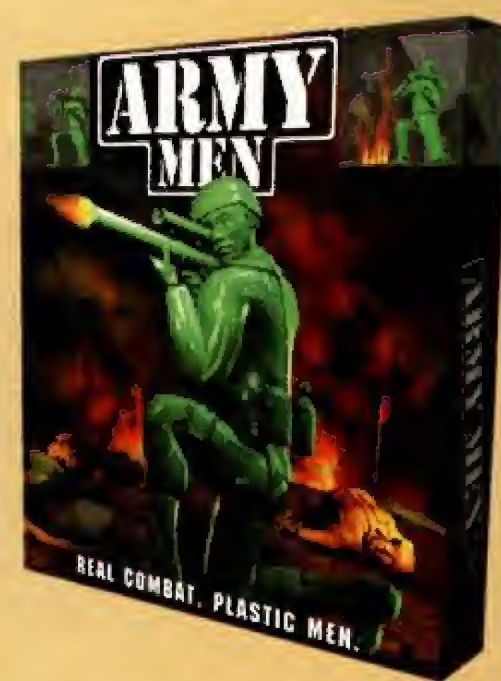
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of burnt plastic
in the morning"



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and bayou terrains or play against your
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Balance of Power

AI makes a lousy wingman

With the release of the Balance of Power add-on, Totally Games has made an honest effort to improve the much-maligned solo-play options in X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter.

There are 30 missions (15 per side, linked by narrative), divided into Imperial and Rebel campaigns, and six new cut-scenes (one after every five missions). As the Rebels, you must avoid being captured by an Imperial task force, while as Imperial pilots, you must contain a Rebel effort to regroup and to build a shipyard capable of constructing capital ships.

However, BP is still most satisfying when there's at least one other human to fly the missions with—four people can play via the Internet and eight over a LAN. All 30 missions can be played cooperatively with other people, and the campaigns still reflect an overwhelming focus on multiplayer design.

True, you can progress through the campaign missions on your own, but it's darn hard to accomplish many mission objectives with computer-controlled wingmen. If there are specific objectives—such as inspecting targets before capturing or destroying them—AI pilots will wait for you to accomplish them instead of chipping in.

Thankfully, BP does possess plenty of virtues to recommend it. You can re-fly any mission in a different squadron, with different objectives and sometimes different aircraft. The B-Wing fighter has been added as a flyable mount on the Rebel side, and fleets now include everything from the Imperial Super Star Destroyer to a modified Rebel Corellian Corvette. Support for 3D cards is now built-in, rather than being a patch; two melee dogfighting missions have been added; and eight combat missions separate from the campaigns are available.



The 3D's good, but not great.

It's not perfect, but Balance of Power is a must-own for fans of X-Wing vs. TIE.

—George T. Chronis

BALANCE OF POWER	GAMEPLAY:	B-	B OVERALL
	GETTING STARTED:	B+	
	GRAPHICS:	B	
	SOUND CHECK:	B+	
	MULTIPLAYER:		A
X-Wing vs. TIE finally gets solo-play missions...sort of.			
DEVELOPER:		Totally Games	
PUBLISHER:		LucasArts	
		888-532-4263	
WEB:		www.lucasarts.com	
PLATFORM:		Win 95 CD	
REQUIRES:		P90, 24MB RAM, 48MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive, X-Wing vs. TIE	
RECOMMENDED:		P166, 32MB RAM, 3D card	
STREET PRICE:		\$30	

Last Bronx

If nothing else, Sega's latest arcade-to-Saturn-to-PC conversion proves they have the capacity to learn. Slowly. Last Bronx is a fighting game in the Virtua Fighter tradition, using an improved VF2 engine and sporting street thugs with clubs fighting for control of the ghettos. A lofty goal to be sure, and it's handled in locales with such provocative names as Lust Subway and Naked Airport.



Your passage across this Seducer-inhabited island won't be easy.

As a diehard VF fan, I was looking forward to this one—and technically, there's a lot to like: This is easily Sega's best conversion. Whereas VF2 PC wouldn't run well even on a P200, Last Bronx does—in hi-res, 16-bit color with full options on. And it's still playable.

While it still lacks 3D support (a patch is promised), this is possibly the best-looking non-accelerated game I've ever seen, once all its visual goodies are turned on. The character details are stunning, and the cleaved females in particular look phenomenal, with smoothed-over curves and shading. Characters have fingers, facial expressions, and clothes and jewelry that move independently. There are also end sequences for all eight characters, a first for Sega. (It's a shame that each has ridiculous goals, but it's a step in the right direction.)

So the graphics check out, but the gameplay still bothers me. For one, there's a noticeable play imbalance with certain characters: The hammer-wielding Zaimoku and annoyingly Barbie-esque Lisa whomp on most of

VF2 with weapons

the other characters with ease, although your mileage with them may vary. Actual play control seemed less intuitive than VF2's, which is odd, since its core is basically unchanged.

Still, bashing the seedy 90210 Juvie Hall Edition characters is pretty fun, and Bronx has network play as well. Not quite VF2, but it's a decent fighter.

—Jason D'Aprile

LAST BRONX	GAMEPLAY:	B	B OVERALL
	GETTING STARTED:	B	
	GRAPHICS:	A	
	SOUND CHECK:	B	
	MULTIPLAYER:		B
Just a few belts below black.			
DEVELOPER:		Sega of Japan	
PUBLISHER:		Sega Entertainment	
		800-872-7342	
WEB:		www.sega.com	
PLATFORM:		Win 95 CD	
REQUIRES:		P90, 16MB RAM, 15MB HD	
RECOMMENDED:		P133	
STREET PRICE:		\$30	

Alien Earth

Strolling through the apocalypse

By Bob Lindstrom

ACTION



The Raksha love a good fox hunt. Today, you're the fox. The hunting horns sound, and you're thrust into a most dangerous game of deadly pursuit.

After invading an Earth weakened by 21st-century nuclear war, the Raksha became slave-masters of the remaining humans, using them as little more than prey for sport.

A soft thunder in the air indicates that the Raksha hordes are charging. You, as Finn, tighten every muscle and leisurely stroll off into the jungle.

Later, in the city, Raksha footfalls pound on the asphalt behind you. Meandering around a corner, Finn trudges down an alley.

Eventually, in the darkness of the underground, the excited din of Raksha voices betrays that Finn's end is near. He saunters into another cave.

Uh, Finn? What's the chance we could pick up the pace a little bit?

Sorry, interactive alter-ego—not in this Alien Earth.

With large measures of RPG and adventure game, plus a blast of Diablo to heat it up, Alien Earth tries to create a new hybrid of real-time action/adventure. Yet, despite its graphics superiority, the game comes off as a one-player Diablo imitator without that best-seller's life-giving multiplayer option.



Naaahh, no need to pick up the pace. A brisk walk should do it.

Since Alien Earth can boast the object-oriented puzzles of an adventure and the panoramic environments of an RPG, the connection with Diablo's kill-and-scavenge design isn't immediately obvious, aside from

the overhead, 2D-flat (though 3D-rendered) perspective—a somewhat regressive look in the age of genuine 3D realism.

The giveaways are the shallow character development (not much more than increasing one's hit points) and an elementary magic system, in which spells are just supernatural weapons. Don't look for arcane herb combinations or complex blendings of spiritual energy here.

The action grinds forward as you find the right weapon or spell, then mouse-click on enemies again and again to destroy them.

Finn's deliberate pace keeps Alien Earth from being the triumph its superior production values suggest it could've been. A little variety of character movement—sprint, jump, or roll, as in Origin's Crusader games—would've made a more engaging rather than repetitive experience.

The graphics and animation are beautifully detailed, whether you're exploring the jungle and hearing the surrounding hubbub of wildlife or creeping into the underground where limited visibility hides alien threats. Some of those threats are downright terrifying. I gasped when I came upon a huge praying mantis slashing swiftly with animated claws, and jumped when a huge alien insect suddenly appeared with its crushing mandibles. These moments of authentic shock show just how close Alien Earth is to hitting a design bull's-eye.

In several branching conversations with NPCs, the game demonstrates the best voiceovers I've heard in a computer game. Real actors, real characters, real quality. It's way beyond the overacted, uneasy voice-work of most products.

In the interactive world, there's no shame in imitation as long as you imitate the best. Alien Earth certainly does that, and, more often than not, adds a little twist or angle that carries imitation to the level of genuine inspiration.

Unfortunately, the monotonous pacing and the main character's limited movement strike a



Gee, that beach ball looks like fun!

fatal blow that hamstrings most of the good work. If Beam Software can find a way to make Finn move more like a human being under hot pursuit and less like a tabletop windup toy, a sequel could be a real winner.

ALIEN EARTH

GAMEPLAY: C
GETTING STARTED: A
GRAPHICS: A
SOUND CHECK: A

B-
OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Practically a hit—sent off course by slow pace and limited movement.

DEVELOPER: Beam Software
PUBLISHER: Playmates Interactive Entertainment
714-428-2000
WEB: www.playmatestoy.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: P90, 16MB RAM, 80MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED: P133, 200MB HD
STREET PRICE: \$45

TIPS

▼ Objects can be hard to find in the richly detailed landscape. Look carefully, and maybe crank up your monitor's brightness a little.
▼ Conversations are not only sources of information, but sources of objects as well. Exhaust all branching possibilities and consider giving gifts. A little generosity can result in useful rewards. ▼ Even well-meaning characters can lure you into dangerous situations. Don't necessarily follow or obey NPCs when they extend hospitality. ▼ One man's junk is another man's homemade bomb. Don't ignore even seemingly insignificant objects that could be combined with other items in your stash. ▼ When moving between graphic areas (as the computer reloads a new portion of the landscape), be ready to retreat. Those ingenious devils at Beam have used this technological necessity as a means to throw nasty surprises in your path.

RANGERS NEVER
GO IT ALONE

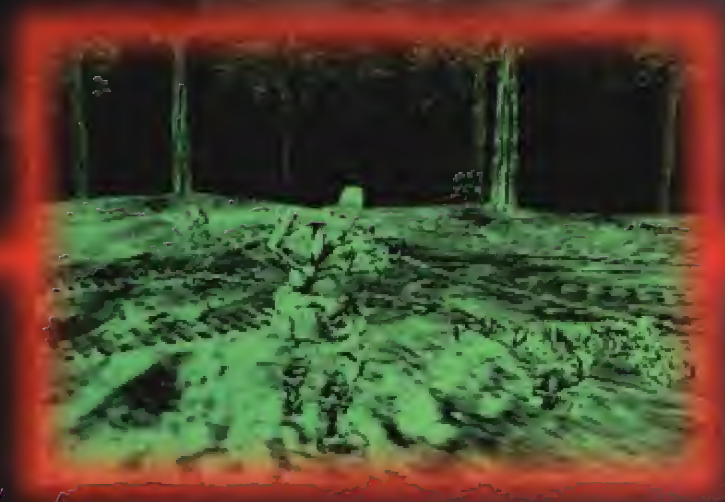
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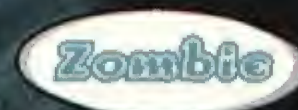
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foreign languages
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soldiers, everything
is authentic.



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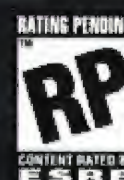
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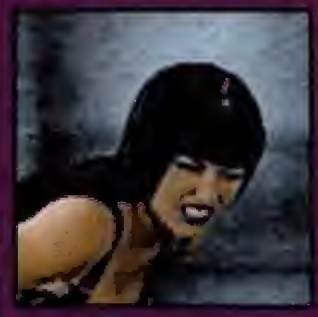
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Riana Rouge

Playmate on the loose!

By Karen Eng and Daniel Morris

What happens when a former *Playboy* Playmate starts up her own game company and stars in the lead role of its first release? Here's Dan Morris and Karen Eng (the ostensible target- and non-target audience, respectively) with the verdict on Gillian Bonner, aka Miss May 1996, and her Black Dragon Productions maiden launch (so to speak), *Riana Rouge*. It transforms Riana in glorious, grainy, point-and-click-style FMV from a sniveling secretary (who gets tossed out a window and falls into a parallel universe) to a superheroine facing a demonic overlord who seems to like his slaves skimpily dressed.

Karen: WHERE'S THE SMUT? Why *else* would I want to play a game starring a former *Playboy* Playmate? Not to get a good attitude, and that's what Riana tries to deliver: a lesson in empowerment. As if trying to save an alien race armed only with the most rudimentary decision-making capabilities, three wigs, and two yards' worth of costume could empower anyone. Who're we kiddin'?

Daniel: I got quite a few laughs out of RR's pseudo-feminist trappings, too. My hat's off to Gillian Bonner for getting her game released; but watching her strut through the scenes, trying to pass herself off as a champion of ass-kickin' femininity, is a bit like watching Posh Spice talk sexual politics.

Karen: Well, to be fair, the player's meant to be rewarded for making sound decisions based on a healthy attitude. Abstractly, I can see the good

in that. Even so, get this: When Riana escapes from jail and gets captured by the warden, her Emotivator (a gadget that presents six choices based on fear, deceit, surrender, attack, seduction, and seeking) offers the options of giving in, bemoaning his lipstick

color, seducing him, giving him lip, being inquisitive, and playing weak. If you pick any but the last ("Please let me live... I wanna live with you and wear matching outfits..."), Riana dies a grisly death. Lesson: Lying and groveling is a good way to get out of trouble. What the hell?

Daniel: The whole game is preposterous. The puzzles are never anything but limp (so to speak). There's a maddening one that requires you to select gargoyles in a sound-sequence—but such puzzles are based on random guessing and have little bearing on problem-solving skill.

Karen: And because there are no cursor hints, you're forced through the same ridiculous FMV loop repeatedly just trying to find a solution and move on. Loading time is none too fast, either. But the biker-movie score's not bad.

Daniel: As for plot, this game makes *Barbarella* look like a Merchant/Ivory movie. The different tasks Riana is faced with, from escaping from the undersea prison to liberating an alien colony, seem more like gags played on the gaming industry than the serious plot devices they're supposed to be.

Karen: Which brings us back to my original question. I could excuse all these faults, plus RR's crude and glitchy sets and animations, embarrassing acting and dialogue, wildly inconsistent sound levels, and even ass-backwards (literally) feminism, *if* I were rewarded with more skin. Smut. SEX! Where is it?

Maybe not putting out is Bonner's way of retaliating against those who exploit Playmate-types for easy thrills. But, assuming her target audience is men, *what man would have the patience?* If you click on Riana, she brushes you off, sneering "Touch yourself, I'm busy." If you choose "seduction" on the Emotivator, she usually gets dismembered (not what I imagine *Playboy* fans are interested in). Maybe there's a

really hot scene at the end of the game, but to be perfectly honest, I couldn't wait. I gave up.



Get past the key-in-slot/battery-charger interface deal to rescue the Pod Guy.

Daniel: You'll never find a more ardent fan of *Playboy* Playmates than me, but I was genuinely discouraged by this misguided, wrongheaded, irredeemable game. It's neither good gaming nor good cheesecake. It's all bad.

RIANA ROUGE

GAMEPLAY: **F**
GETTING STARTED: **A**
GRAPHICS: **F**
SOUND CHECK: **D+**

F
OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: **N/A**

K: Give me the *Tom of Finland Pop-Up Book* any day. Sheesh.
D: The launch party at Hefner Mansion was a blast. This isn't.

DEVELOPER: Black Dragon Productions
PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive
800-617-8737
WEB: www.eidosinteractive.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: P90, 16MB RAM, 30MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED: P120
STREET PRICE: \$50

TIPS

▼ To see Riana tinkle: In the Prison, grab the sheet off the bed and stuff it into the hole in the wall so Gash can't see. What modesty! ▼ To see Riana's eating disorder: At the picnic table in the Indulgences level, choose the cake first. It's not wafer-thin! ▼ Prime Riana-viewing spots (after all, you've gotta get *something* for your money, right?): (1) Every time you choose a level from the Midworld Temple, Riana undergoes a transformation. If you hit the space bar at just the right moment, voilà! Nekkid Riana! (2) In the Island level, after retrieving the "kinda broken" bowl from the left hut, take Riana for a stroll on the beach. Click the bowl on the sea. Riana will scoop and pose—hubba hubba!



Dreams to Reality

Dream Raider

By Daniel Morris

ADVENTURE



French developer Cryo Interactive has a history of titles that sometimes don't deliver the interesting gameplay to go with the interesting premise. It's hard to say anything too bad about Dreams to Reality, Cryo's stab at a Tomb Raider-killer. The game's surreal setting and creative inventiveness keep it from ever being a bore, but Lara Croft has nothing to worry about.

Anyone familiar with Tomb Raider (this means you) will be immediately familiar with Dreams' look, feel, and basic gameplay. It's got the exact same third-person-action perspective, with the same dynamic cinema-style camera and 3Dfx-tailored texture (3Dfx is the only 3D card supported). Where Dreams has tried to push the envelope is in its fantasy game-world based on the collective subconscious of dreams, and by incorporating a system of manna and magic spells.

like flying, which Duncan figures out how to do very early in the game.

The combat mode is simplistic and sparingly employed. When engaging a foe, you shift automatically into combat mode: one key-press dictates karate punches and kicks or use of the weaponry that can be found. There's a sword, handgun, bow, and of course the spells you can gain from the automatically accruing manna points (which can also be boosted by power-ups) and used to do neat things like possess other beings' bodies.

The gameworld is supposed to be an eye-popping, jaw-dropping land of the surreal, but Cryo sort of drops the ball in its rather mundane presentation of this universe. Not counting the expansive skies with weird clouds, the dreamscape looks a lot like Tomb Raider: filled with caverns, dark hallways, ruined palaces, and the like. The puzzles and traps are mostly conventional, with such standbys as the bridge with collapsing boards and the Salvador-Dali-inspired house, whose doors seem to open only into each other.

Cryo also fumbled the opportunity for truly memorable enemies. My nightmares are full of horrific nasties

(thanks to all these games I play all day). Yet the bad guys in Dreams are often generic goblin-and-skeleton types and seem, well, kind of humdrum.

The 3Dfx-accelerated graphics are well done, except for the blatant clipping problems that seem to hound all such games. My biggest gripe with the graphics is that Duncan's movements are nowhere near the lifelike captures of Lara Croft—he always seems to be moving in jerks and hops, and his jumping is particularly mechanical. The sound design does its best to



The blue pixies will offer you marginally useful advice to help steer you on your way.

provide surreal ambiance but sometimes sounds more like a Beatles-animation soundtrack.

Fans of the Tomb Raider series looking for a magical twist on the genre will be entertained by Dreams. But they certainly won't rank it with TR in the accomplishment category. Cryo can consider this an interesting first step toward a Lara-killer, but there's work to be done. Surreal, yes; spectacular, no.



Bizarre's the word. Good thing you've got that hefty sword.

The game begins with the revelation that there is a strange portal linking the real world with the world of dreams. A force of evil (curse it!) has infiltrated the dreamworld and is manipulating nightmares to affect the real world. Obviously, you can't allow this; so as Duncan, a buffed-out "dream warrior," you dive into the portal in search of the bad guys.

Game action follows TR pretty closely, except that the range of motion and precision of control aren't quite as elegantly fluid. But there are some intriguing new things to try—

DREAMS TO REALITY

GAMEPLAY: **C**
GETTING STARTED: **C+**
GRAPHICS: **B-**
3D ACCELERATED: **B+**
SOUND CHECK: **B-**

C
OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: **N/A**

A mishmash of Tomb Raider and Twinsen's Odyssey—minus their inspired high points.

DEVELOPER: Cryo Interactive
PUBLISHER: Interplay
800-468-3775
WEB: www.cryo-interactive.fr
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: P90, 16MB RAM, 50MB HD, SVGA, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED: P133, 3Dfx card
STREET PRICE: \$45

TIPS

▼ Your balance meter indicates your current balance between combat and magic. Keep it in check, or bizarre things start to happen to you. ▼ Flying costs manna, so use it only when you need to. ▼ Some of the most unlikely things can be jumped onto and climbed if you just give it the effort. You'd better, because finding these climbing routes is sometimes the only way out. ▼ Swimming requires oxygen, which expires faster than it does in Tomb Raider. Find the underwater oxygen for extended swims.



Fighter Ace

Head for the skies

Not known for letting others profit from a good idea, Microsoft has made a bid for online air supremacy with its own WWII slugfest, *Fighter Ace*.

This first "premium" game offered on MS's Zone starts up pretty easily: Set up an account, download the 7MB front-end software, and enter the fray for \$2 a day (or \$20 a month). Eight vintage WWII aircraft are available (with early- and late-model versions), and you can choose arcade or realistic flight modeling. The full-realism planes exhibit proper stalls, black-

outs, and even fuel starvation when pushed beyond their flight envelopes; but sadly, they don't seem too popular with most Zone players.

Rookie pilots begin in a Boot Camp arena that offers Free for All or Team Play. Once you've accumulated enough kills and points, you're promoted into the officer ranks and win the option to take on the Zone's elite pilots. Of course, you can stay in the Arcade-specific arenas for as long as you like.

Even without 3D acceleration, the texture-mapped planes and cockpit art are attractively rendered, and damaged planes display terrific flame and smoke effects. The flat terrain looks almost photorealistic from above 2,000 feet, but it deteriorates to gaudy rectangles once you're down on the deck. FA's sound, one of its strongest features, regales you with the wail of air-raid sirens and the buzz of enemy fighters, enhancing the immersive dogfighting.

WarBirds and Air Warrior vets probably won't be impressed with FA's serious lack of

depth and poor strategy implementation. The airbases are barely a couple of clicks apart, so you'll often find yourself in manic melees within seconds of liftoff. And the less-than-stellar keyboard-communication interface merely perpetuates the game's lone-wolf tactics. Still, newbie pilots should enjoy this. —Andy Mahood



There are plenty of vicious pilots online.

FIGHTER ACE	GAMEPLAY:	C+
	GETTING STARTED:	A-
	GRAPHICS:	B
	SOUND CHECK:	A
	MULTIPLAYER:	B-
Arcade dogfighting for casual flyers.		
DEVELOPER:	VR-1	
PUBLISHER:	Microsoft	
	800-426-9400	
WEB:	www.microsoft.com	
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD	
REQUIRES:	P75, 16MB RAM, 9.5MB HD, IE 3.02 or higher, 2x CD-ROM drive	
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 32MB RAM	
STREET PRICE:	Free download; online charge of \$1.95/day or \$19.95/mo.	

B-
OVERALL

Sega Touring Car Championship

Loose wheels

Sega's philosophy for car-racing games has always been simple: Offer up a handful of exotic racers loosely based on some real-world series and throw in a small selection of attractive fantasy tracks to run them on. Keep the setup options basic and ensure that the car is in a constant state of four-wheel drift as players bash their way through the field.



Sideways skids are almost unavoidable.

Romeo 155V6Ti, AMG Mercedes C-Class, Opel Calibra V6, and Toyota Supra) taken from the starting grid of the popular European Touring Car Series. Three tracks don't even attempt to emulate real-life circuit design. The fast, flat-as-a-board Country Circuit, the mountainous Grunwald track, and the tight-and-twisty Brick Wall Town provide a diverse mix of circuitous fantasy—but without 3D-card support, none of them can be categorized as particularly attractive (a D3D patch is in the works).

Perhaps conscious of the game's lack of depth, Sega boosted the computer AI to a level that makes computer cars all but impossible to catch, even at the lowest difficulty setting. The cars pitch sideways everywhere like they're running on ice, and any attempt to tune them at the optional setup screen is a compromise at best, because you're forced to stick with that setup for all three circuits when you're in the multirace Championship mode.

There may be some saving grace in multiplay (eight-player LAN or two-player modem/split-screen play), if you can find someone to share the loosey-goosey driving experience. As a standalone racer, though, STCC ranks as one of the shortest and most disappointing rides I've seen in quite awhile.

—Andy Mahood

STCC	GAMEPLAY:	D
	GETTING STARTED:	B
	GRAPHICS:	C
	SOUND CHECK:	C+
	MULTIPLAYER:	B
Race to the Recycle Bin.		
PUBLISHER:	Sega Entertainment	
	800-872-7342	
WEB:	www.sega.com	
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD	
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 30MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive	
RECOMMENDED:	P133, MMX	
STREET PRICE:	\$30	

D
OVERALL

STCC follows that script closely. The game has four nicely rendered production cars (Alfa

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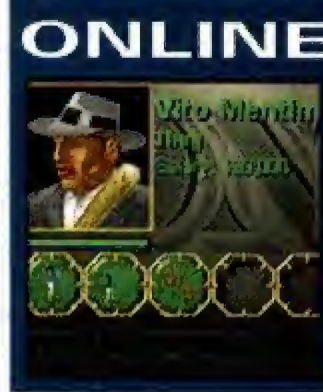
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Legal Crime

Where's Eliot Ness when you need him?

By Don St. John



Don Vito surveyed his vast empire contentedly. Sure, the pezzonovantes who fought for power within his domain thought they had it made, that brute force was the way to the top. But long years of experience had taught the Don a powerful lesson, one he never forgot—that true authority comes from political power, from domain over the police, the army, even the FBI. And he had gathered those resources. Now, he ruled completely. After all, it was his destiny.

—Don “Vito” St. John

The Godfather dominated a world without computers or modems. Today, via Legal Crime, people can strive for world domination by dialing in from four continents. This online-only game (no retail version is available) charges you to gain ultimate power over cities by the most time-honored methods—strong-arming, bribery, prostitution, gambling, murder. Especially murder.

Not that it's some school for turning your apple-cheeked A student into a Thompson-toting hoodlum. Legal Crime is basically an isometric-view real-time strategy game that puts you in charge of a syndicate trying to bump off competitors. Naturally, you can form alliances—which may last as long as they need to and no longer—or you can go it alone, using sheer muscle to get ahead.

The grid-based cities you're fighting over aren't exactly things of beauty. (Two silver linings: lag isn't much of an issue, and the download is small.) Your tiny figures have tiny real-time gun bat-

tles, while top-hatted collectors run moneybags from the business you're extorting from back to your headquarters. You and your competitors begin with some money, influence over a few blocks, and a couple of thugs or pistol



Bugsy prepares a raid on enemy HQ.

men—lower-level soldiers who do your bidding. These guys are straight out of the *Book of Bad Italian Stereotypes*; whatever Legal Crime's virtues, subtlety isn't one of them.

Games of varying sizes are supported on the developer's own servers. Map-size limits player-number, but you're unlikely to have more than eight gangs battling it out. Other options—such as the amount of money you start with and the city you're battling in—are set by the person hosting the game.

Extortion is central to your efforts, much like mining in many other strategy games. The more funds you amass, the more you have with which to grease police, politicians, the army, or the FBI—not to mention hire more

hitmen. You can take the quality of the last up quite a bit by adding snipers, Thompson men (machine-gunners who can blast away from a car), and even terrorists. With enough firepower, you can start rubbing out other

families—extending your range and grabbing more blocks of territory, building by building. Political bribes, meanwhile, help you with harassment techniques and protection as you upgrade business to prostitution

houses, casinos, or bootlegging factories. It all lasts until there's one family left standing.

Finland-based publisher Byte Enchanters has tried to cop some attitude. It's kinda misplaced, though: Legal Crime is simply too much an easy, fleetingly fun little strategy tussle to be truly politically incorrect.

Serious strat players will probably lose interest after the first couple of passes. However, for less intense gamers or people who want to get their strategy feet wet, this game has one

major enticement—the price. A mere \$20 gets you a lifetime Legal Crime license, with no hourly charges or updates. And let's face it: a \$20 one-shot fee can do a lot to compensate for dinky graphics, broad *Untouchables* plot ripoffs, and the occasional hood kicking your butt outta town.



Ben Scarsosa just used the classic method of stopping the enemy's income flow.

LEGAL CRIME

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	D
SOUND CHECK:	B-
MULTIPLAYER: B	

C+

OVERALL

A passable—if unsubtle—effort at making crime pay.

PUBLISHER: Byte Enchanters

WEB: www.byteenchanters.com

PLATFORM: Win 95/Win NT

REQUIRES: P100, 16MB RAM, 20MB HD, 1MB video card, 14.4 modem

RECOMMENDED: 2MB video card, 28.8 modem

STREET PRICE: \$20 (Internet only)

TIPS

- ▼ Grab some shooters to deploy outward as soon as you can, so you can leave basic thugs and pistol men to defend headquarters.
- ▼ As you forge outward, absolutely build collection centers. Your collectors can't protect themselves, and their boodle is critical to your continued growth.
- ▼ Bribes don't come from your bank balance, only from your income. Thus, as soon as your savings are at a comfortable level (say, \$500,000 in an average game), divert all your income to bribes; concentrate on the cops and army first.
- ▼ Build a ring of stakeouts around strategic corners near your headquarters; they'll serve as a defense perimeter.



Virus: The Game

Protect your .EXEs!

By Don St. John

Finally, technonerdz have a game they can truly call their own. In a unique style, *Virus: The Game* uses your machine's files in 3D graphical form as the basis for a quest to stop viruses from propagating through your system. What a perverse idea—letting your actual system be invaded? You can relax, though—it really is just a game, and nothing really happens to your files.

Virus takes your actual hard-drive directories as the basis for its environment. What you see on the right side of your screen is a directory structure lifted right from your hard drive; the left side (the 3D graphical side) has a set of



In multiplayer, send viruses to friends' computers (and peek at their files).

pathways and rooms that correspond to the displayed directory tree. As you pass through color-coded doors on your vehicles, you're going from one file to the next, with the current room shaded in your directory list. For instance, I started out one game in my PaintShop Pro directory: One room was the PSP.EXE file, others corresponded to various JPGs that I'd captured and saved. Going through green doors moved me from one JPG file to the next, and as I passed through rooms, the game projected the file contents on the walls; similarly, cruise through any of your .WAV or other sound files, and you'll hear them played.

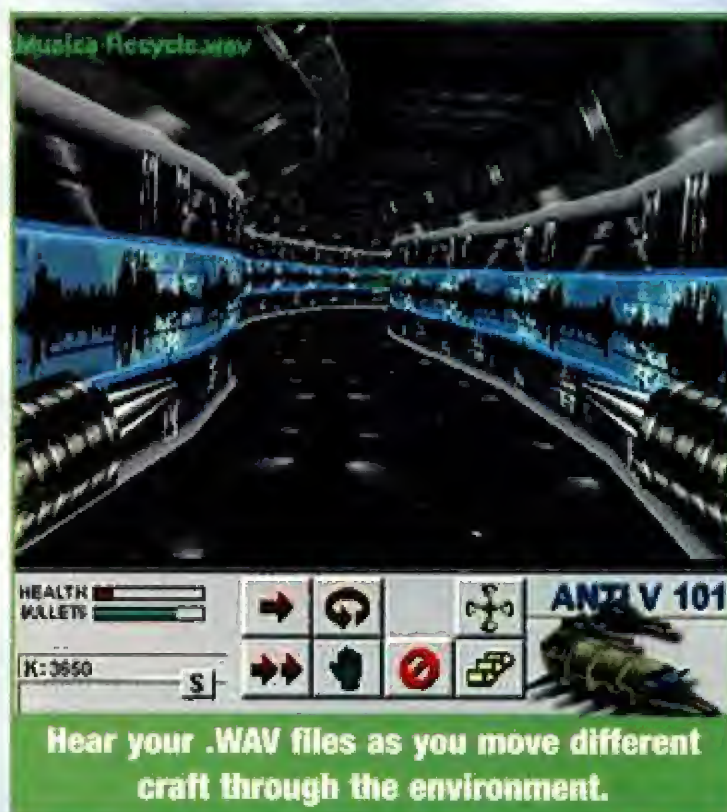
The actual action takes place in the 3D environments with a real-time-strategy, resource-management slant, where you choose any room to build your base, known as the KB Transformer. There, you build a Vehicle Factory, where you can then build a KB

Collector and attack craft. Each file is rated—just as it really is—by KB size, and your Collector can “harvest” these KBs, which act as *Virus*' resource currency. To build more stuff, you need more KBs.

While you're doing all this, viruses are coming after you and your base. An invaded file gets coded with a big red V; when you see that, you need to get an attack craft over to the affected area and blast the virus. The environments work like *Descent*, with a full six degrees of motion and the very real chance of accompanying fatal disorientation. (Playing the tutorial and then hitting the practice level a bunch of times helps with the acclimation process.)

Fun? Well, sort of. The action moves quickly, with codes popping up on your directory right off the bat. Navigating is pretty simple—much of the time you can use autopilot to get to a target room, where you can do battle with a virus. The little buggers propagate pretty quickly, though, and catching up to them while harvesting all the KB you need is tough. No question: *Virus* doesn't lack for action.

Whether it all needs to be tied to your directories, though, is another question. I found that the best way to lay strategy was to ignore file names. Do I really want to get intimately involved with VJY32.DLL? Not particularly. Granted, the structure takes the game out of the



Hear your .WAV files as you move different craft through the environment.



Each new game selects different directories, making the journey different each time.

realm of just-another-action/strategy-game, and I'm one of those who's grown to like goofing around with the gut-level files in my machine. But that's a different kind of fun than *Virus* offers. This is a game that's good for fast thought in your most alert states, but it's not really relaxing or engrossing. If you really love the environment of a PC and take viruses personally, then *Virus* is for you. Anyone else can probably find a more direct path to their action.

VIRUS

GAMEPLAY: **B**
GETTING STARTED: **B-**
GRAPHICS: **B+**
SOUND CHECK: **B+**

B
OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: **B-**

The esoteric feel of cruising through your computer's directories blunts the action.

DEVELOPER: Kidum Multimedia
PUBLISHER: Sirtech Software
315-393-6633
WEB: www.sir-tech.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: P100, 16MB RAM, 40MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED: P166 MMX, 24MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE: \$50

TIPS

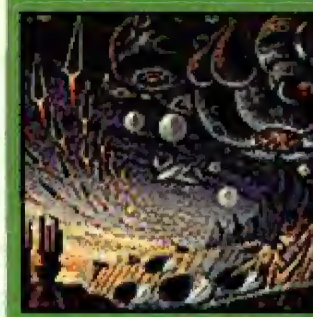
▼ Burrow! Only your attack and battle craft have weapons, so you need to get your installation and your Collector and Converter vehicles as deep into a directory as you can. ▼ Until you're totally comfortable with all six degrees of motion, rely on your up/down keys when doing battle with a virus. There'll be stuff to duck behind for shielding. ▼ Get used to sending your Collector out via autopilot, then switching to attack-craft mode. You can track the Collector's progress by watching the directory files. (Don't forget to bring it back to drop off its KBs at the Transformer; they're no good until it does.)

Deadlock II: Shrine Wars

New intergalactic race-relations initiative

By Barry Brenesal

STRATEGY



Released two years ago, the original Deadlock was a turn-based, strategic galaxy-conquering sim rather like Master of Orion II—scoring points on quality graphics and resource management, but losing them because it lacked MOOII's tactical-battle control and extensive diplomatic menu.

Deadlock II: Shrine Wars follows a familiar space-race quest formula wherein you win by conquering all the other nations, building a predetermined number of City Centers, or, in a new twist, finding and holding the eponymous shrines. This all unravels en route to locating Xythra, the fabled homeworld of the Ancients.

New features have been added, others tweaked, and everything good carried over from the original. The most obvious change is

whimsical humor. As the disease-obsessed Maug put it to those who please them, "Long may your liver thrive!"

There's more of everything to manipulate in Deadlock II, including 13 new technologies, 14 new building types, and nine new combat units. Your forces can now rule the oceans as well as the earth and air, designing sea platforms for extra living space.

The interface, too, has been completely redesigned. All the information and decision-making tools you need are available from a single panel. And just in case you find micromanagement a trifle wearing, there's an automated Colony assistant to help optimize those choices.

You also get new trade and diplomacy features, but neither lives up to its potential. The trade utility, for instance, functions entirely based on need. For example, offer a computer player the most appealing resources in the game for just shipping costs—

items that can be sold immediately on the Skirineen Black Market at 30 times the price—and it'll reject them if it doesn't need them immediately.

The new diplomacy module is just as brain-dead. A computer player will look at what he's given you, what you've given him, and whether you've hurt one another. Throw in a sizable random factor, and that's Deadlock II's idea of diplomacy. I've had a computer-driven ally shatter a full victory pact the turn before our joint win, because he had just given me a new research, thus lowering my rating in his eyes.

Deadlock II's overall AI is good, though, like MOOII's AI, it favors those races with high reproductive or attacking bonuses.



Right-click on any research item to get a full description.

Both game balance and network support (via modem and serial) are excellent, but Accolade's own Deadlock.net wasn't available for testing at press time.

Ultimately, the game promises more than it delivers, but it still delivers quite a lot (and a free scenario-editor patch is promised). As a standalone game, it comes in a strong second behind MOOII, given the latter's tactical battle and diplomatic options; but in multiplayer, where diplomacy and trade considerations are governed by human intelligence, Deadlock II really shines.



Pithy video messages blend useful info with style and personality.

the inclusion of a campaign. You play a series of six scenarios, conquering planet after planet and converting them to way stations as you lead your chosen people toward Xythra. (The scenarios and their challenges vary according to which of the seven races you choose.) The shrines uncovered along the way convey mysterious benefits. They look pretty neat, too.

So do the video clips of 3D-rendered representatives from the various races, who appear with a sharp repertoire of messages throughout the game. They make literally dozens of remarks in any of several moods: praise, brags, taunts, complaints, and personally customized entries. The comments earn marks for

DEADLOCK II: SHRINE WARS

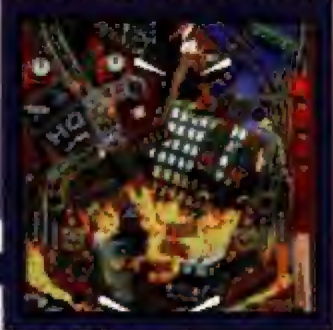
GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

B+
OVERALL

Better, but still plays second fiddle to MOOII.

PUBLISHER: Accolade
800-245-7744
Web: www.accolade.com
Platform: Win 95/Win NT CD
Requires: P90, 16MB RAM, 62MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive
Recommended: P133, 32MB RAM, 299MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
Street Price: \$50

CHEATS ▽ During gameplay, hold down **Ctrl + F12** and type:
S-Mart: Summons the Skirineen immediately.
Greeblie: Lets you add selected technologies.
LEO: Gives you satellite vision.
Bigbro: Gives you spy-level vision.



Balls of Steel

Combo! Double combo!

might've known Duke Nukem had Balls of Steel. The always mui-macho-yet-suavecito Duke is a real good reason to try out this new pinball game. Aficionados of the genre should be reasonably pleased with this offering, which dishes up five

tables that compare well with other entries in the bumper-banging field, while offering nothing spectacularly new.

Balls does the basics well and even improves the genre in one

critical area—it gives you a choice of single-screen, scrolling, or auto-switching mode (which changes from a single-screen view to scrolling whenever the more complicated multi-ball is active). The tables themselves are classic-style pinball games with added animation: Mutation gives you slime to battle, Barbarian a dragon, and Firestorm (the best of the basic four) forces you to hit targets to douse fires.

Of course, the Duke table's what sets this apart, complete with plenty of new one-liners from The Man himself. You'll search out colored keycards, splatter Octabrain, and use a jetpack to navigate a broken ramp.

The tables are generally similar except for the mini-games, add-on videogames such as tug-of-war that add to your total. Also, among the four difficulty modes is one that lets you post scores to the Net (www.worldscores.com) for ego gratification or tournaments. There's hot-seat multiplayer for two to four players, but no Internet or LAN play.

Physics are quite proper, complete with the occasional draggy flippers you'll wrestle on real

tables. The nudge keys, however, are needlessly touchy: more than one tap generally sends you down the drain. Mouse-controlled exploration of the table (a la Timeshock!) instead of the usual text description panels would really help. (C'mon, guys, use those computing capabilities!) Still, Balls is a worthy compendium of fun tables. Come get some. —Don St. John



The Duke table is lookin' good.

BALLS OF STEEL	GAMEPLAY: B+	B+ OVERALL
	GETTING STARTED: A-	
	GRAPHICS: B+	
	SOUND CHECK: A-	
	MULTIPLAYER: B+	
Solid pinball, plus the Dukester.		
DEVELOPER:	Pinball Wizards	
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive	
	800-610-4847	
WEB:	www.gtinteractive.com	
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD	
REQUIRES:	P100, 16MB RAM, 70MB HD, 1MB SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive	
RECOMMENDED:	P133	
STREET PRICE:	\$35	

Star Trek Pinball

To boldly go to the bargain bin

was in a good mood when I loaded up ST Pinball. I wasn't by the time I'd finished. Reviewing games isn't always fun. Among the Jedi Knights and FIFAs, there's your ST Pinball—a flagrant, nay, heinous abomination of a perfectly good license.

It's DOS-based, so getting the sound and video to work simultaneously is awkward, unless your machine's configured to deal with it. My initial try resulted in music (a decent combination of the original series theme and other electric tracks) but no sound effects

(though the game detected all the necessary cards perfectly well).

On another PC, I got the sound effects—and realized that my initial misfortune was actually a blessing in disguise. Over the three tables—Qapla' (Klingon for "Success"), Nemesis, and To Boldly Go (christened the "Kirk Love Table" by one editor; see screen)—the sound effects start at irritating and end at pathetic. Samples of the crew's famous lines are interspersed with the infamous door-opening and phaser-fire sounds.

The physics model is quite simply a disgrace. The speeds, angles, and reactions are a total mess. The tables offer multiball—a pinball staple and favorite—but the whole point's lost among the ridiculous movement.

The tables are blessed with a few interesting features, but it's such a lottery keeping the ball alive—not the feat of skill it's supposed to be—that frustration is inevitable.

One redeeming feature could've been the Nemesis table, designed for two opponents to play concurrently. But—setting aside the fact

that of all the tables, Nemesis has the most basic functions and excruciating sounds, plus the least visual appeal—its network feature doesn't even work (to be fixed with a patch), so you're stuck doubling up at one machine.

Big name, big company, big license, and a complete disregard for standards. Don't be tempted by the name. —Rob Smith



The "Kirk Love Table": awful moves, corny lines.

STAR TREK PINBALL	GAMEPLAY: F	F OVERALL
	GETTING STARTED: D	
	GRAPHICS: C	
	SOUND CHECK: D	
	MULTIPLAYER: D	
Complete crap.		
DEVELOPER:	Sales Curve Interactive	
PUBLISHER:	Interplay	
	800-468-3775	
WEB:	www.interplay.com	
PLATFORM:	DOS 6.22/Win 95 CD	
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 15MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive	
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive	
STREET PRICE:	\$30	

Alley 19 Bowling

In the gutter

Hell is a PC bowling alley. Real-world bowling is a lot of fun, and by straining my cerebral muscles, I can probably think of a fun computer-bowling game. (...Ten Pin Alley. Whew—there.)

But Alley 19 Bowling may well be the least entertaining computer game of the last few years. This ludicrous experience consists of nothing more than picking a ball off the conveyor, aiming, and clicking to throw the thing.

The ball “physics” are abominable, and if you try to massage your throw, you can create truly humorous spins and wobbles that make the ball look



like a wandering, living thing. The control is more than suspect, and the sound consists of nothing more than grating jukebox tunes and people saying “Shake it off!” or “Yesss!” The very notion of four-player Internet play, which the game includes, is comical.

The worthless gameplay is cloaked in a faux-1950s *Grease* setting. Frankly, I’d rather sit through the movie another few dozen times.

—Daniel Morris

PUBLISHER: StarPlay
800-203-2503
Web: www.starplay.com
PLATFORM: Mac/Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE: \$35



Deer Hunter

Shoots itself squarely in the foot

This hunting game lets you prowls three woodsy environments via a top-down map, looking for signs of Bambi.

When you find a likely spot, you drop to first-person with one of three weapons and a range of



equipment. You don’t move but can turn 360 degrees and look up and down.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep (especially in snowy Indiana). But in DH, hunting seems

a lot like fishing: I waited...and waited...until even my in-game persona started grumbling.

Besides, what fun’s a hunting game that doesn’t let you walk through the woods? This is little more than a semi-functional shooting gallery. On one system, it regularly crashed in hunting mode until I applied a 3MB patch. On another, the mouse’s performance in map mode was so erratic as to be useless.

Bottom line: I have no trouble passing this buck.

—Peter Olafson

PUBLISHER: WizardWorks
800-229-2714
Web: www.wizworks.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE: \$15



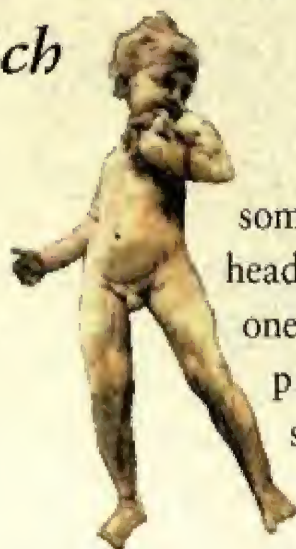
Monty Python’s The Meaning of Life

It’s a Spam-and-bug sandwich

What is the meaning of life? Well, you might or might not find out in the third game offering from the ribald British comedy troupe. This one’s based on their 1983 movie and frames much of the film’s best material with some typically bizarre puzzles, a dense maze, and a send-up of You Don’t Know Jack that may be even funnier than the original game.

Trouble is, TMOL was 7th Level’s parting shot before getting out of the game business, and it seems they couldn’t be bothered to design a decent interface or, worse yet, catch a couple of bugs ranging from minor to fatal. One’s right before the game’s end, too. See you later, chumps.

Meanwhile, Panasonic Interactive Media, which picked up the game, says it’s working on a patch, although there was no ETA at press time. (If you can’t wait, the folks at www.gamefaqs.com devised some workarounds; you can find them there or at www.pcgames.com.)



The gameplay itself has some great stuff for Python-heads. Terry Gilliam served as one of the game’s executive producers, and the five surviving Pythons have surrounded the film material with tons of

hilarity. Beware, though: TMOL is easily Python’s most scatological effort, both on film and here. (Yes, the World’s Fattest Man is here, and yes, he explodes.) The double-disc set has three acts; Act 1 is too easy, while Acts 2 and 3 have some cracking hard puzzles. The unevenness is ultimately annoying.

The game’s loaded with Gilliam’s classic, low-tech animations. Unfortunately, this gives it an unnecessarily cheap look. There’s not nearly enough Monty Python in the world these days, and when you get a taste like this, you can’t help but wish it had come in a better package.

—Don St. John



He couldn’t possibly eat another thing...but he will.

THE MEANING OF LIFE

GAMEPLAY: C+
GETTING STARTED: B-
GRAPHICS: C
SOUND CHECK: B+



MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Enough things go splat! in Python productions that the bugs should’ve too.

DEVELOPER: 7th Level
PUBLISHER: Panasonic Interactive Media
888-763-4433
Web: www.pimcom.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: P100, 16MB RAM, 51MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED: A wafer-thin mint
STREET PRICE: \$50

End Game

By Peter Olafson

END GAME



Compilations and collections can offer great value if you're looking for some overlooked classics or a piece of gaming history. Here's the latest bunch, out now.

Ultima's good name has been dragged through MUD lately. Depending on who's talking, the multiplayer Ultima Online is apparently like visiting Disneyland on July 4th weekend or being the victim of a medieval drive-by.

So the release of *The Ultima Collection* seems like an act of redemption. The simplistic early Ultimas (and Garriott's pre-Ultima hack-'n'-slash Akalabeth) aren't likely to be of more than historical and sentimental interest. But Ultima IV's puzzle rooms, V's bewitching detail, VI's graphical beauty (relative to its era), and the perfect vastness of the two VIIs have lost little of their charm. And while the single-character focus and action orientation of VIII—the foundation for Origin's Crusader games—alienated a portion of the series' hardcore RPG following, it, too, has held up surprisingly well.

Caveats: The compilers have used Mo'Slo Deluxe to knock down the speed on the early games, but, curiously, not on later ones. Consequently, VII flies on a P200 MMX. And it's a shame they've left out the two early-'90s spin-offs from the Ultima VI engine—the Worlds of Ultima games *Savage Empire* and *Martian Dreams*. (Origin; www.origin.ea.com; \$40) **A-**

Less curious is the omission of the two Ultima Underworld games. These superb first-person dungeon crawls—forerunners of *System Shock*—turn up on Interplay's *The Ultimate RPG Archives* in company with the three Bard's Tales and a serviceable BT construction set. Also included are the BT-like *Dragon Wars*; the post-apocalyptic classic *Wasteland* (precursor to *Fallout*); the exquisite *Stonekeep*; New World's mating of *Might & Magics IV* and *V* (the marathon *World of Xeen*); Sirtech's *Wizardry Gold* (a Windows 95 version of *Wizardry 7*); and a 500-plus-page manual. Unfortunately, none of those pages

includes copy protection for the Bard's Tale games, though a patch has been released to solve this problem.

Selections are a little Interplay-centric for my taste—where are *Betrayal at Krondor* and *Darklands* in this "ultimate" collection?—and the installers are not foolproof. The one for



Ultima Underworld kicked one of my systems into an endless loop of reboots. (Interplay; www.interplay.com; \$40) **B-**

Speaking of RPGs, *Halls of the Dead: Faery Tale Adventure II* did finally come out—but via compilation-maker Encore rather than start-up Ignite (under whose imprint I reviewed it some months back). This gorgeous, Ultima VII-like game of exploration seems to have been cleaned up a tad from the preproduction Ignite version. Shame they didn't beef up the repetitive chats with NPCs, too. (Encore; www.encoresoftware.com; \$30) **B+**

I've always been confused by all the Descents. *Destination Saturn*? *Destination Quartzon*? *The Infinite Abyss*? Please—I'm still trying to figure out which way's up. So my primary response to *Descent I and II: The Definitive Collection* is gratitude to Interplay for helping

me straighten out my shelves by putting everything significant in one place. (Interplay; www.interplay.com; \$20) **B**

Kill-A-Ton Collection for Duke Nukem 3D does a similarly thorough job of anthologizing the complete works of 3D Realms' trash-talking hero, up through his exploits in Washington, D.C. (GT Interactive; www.gtgames.com; \$55) **A-**

Towers of Darkness brings together the 3D shooters in Raven's Heretic lineup through the Hexen add-on—including the otherwise hard-to-find Windows 95 version of Hexen. (GT Interactive; www.gtgames.com; \$30) **B**

The Heroes of Might & Magic Compendium is a solid one-stop shop for this King's Bounty of the '90s. (KB's even tucked away on one of the CDs.) (New World Computing;

www.nwcomputing.com; \$40) **A-**

And it's nice to have *Lord of the Realms II* and its *Siege Pack* in flanking positions in *Lords Royal Collection*...even though they effectively render the accompanying original LOTR irrelevant. (Sierra; www.sierra.com; \$45) **B-**

Completeness isn't always a virtue in itself. Sierra's recent *Collection Series* compilations of the *King's Quest*, *Space Quest*, and *Leisure Suit Larry* series, for example, did nothing to soothe the betrayal I felt at the antiseptic graphics in those games' later versions. Sierra's *non-sugar-coated* franchises—*Quest for Glory* and *Police Quest*—fare much better in their retrospectives. The four multi-character QFG games remain the only Sierra adventures I've ever wanted to replay. And I've discovered I like *Police Quest* better in one big chunk than I ever did in five little ones. It's a gritty answer to *King's Quest*. I'm even beginning to enjoy SWAT! (Sierra; www.sierra.com; \$40 each) QFG, **A-**; Police, **B**





every breath they take
could be your last



Rage
SOFTWARE LTD.

Full Force Feedback support

3D spatialized sound

8 player LAN Network play

Atmospheric soundtrack

Stunning lighting FX



INCOMING



GAME SHORTS



Arcade's Greatest Hits 2

Still a blast

With Microsoft Return of Arcade's continued success, producing this sequel to Williams Arcade Classics was a no-brainer. The real shocker: how much fun these oldies still are.

Subtitled The Midway Collection, this pack of old-school arcade ports sports six coin-op classics plus Splat!, a game Midway never released. I wasn't too thrilled with the newbie (a challenging, Robotron-style food fight). Using the game's simple interface, I snuck over to Spy Hunter, one of my all-time favorites. Hungry for more, I peppered my way through Burgertime; took Moon Patrol's lunar leisure-ride; served greedy

barflies in Root Beer Tapper; and lanced Joust 2's birdy baddies. Finally, I cruised through Blaster, a first-person space battle with hilariously simple sounds and graphics.

Each game is playable via keyboard, joystick, or gamepad and offers one- or two-player action. Sure, you can get some of these for free online via arcade-emulation software (technically illegal unless you own the originals), but GT's compiled 'em for you. Eighties arcade freaks will dig this.

—Corey Cohen

PUBLISHER: GT Interactive
800-610-4847
WEB: www.gtgames.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE: \$30



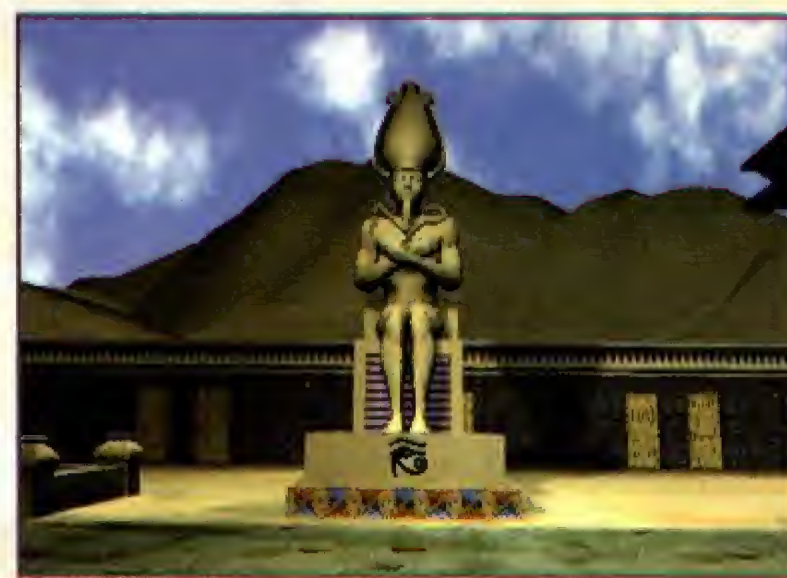
Beyond Time

Myst fog

Years later, Myst's success is still responsible for a death-spiral of adventure games trying to pack in weird exotic locations, artifacts, and puzzles, hoping they might somehow coalesce into a hit.

Beyond Time enters this fold with a historic vengeance. The setup's presented in a laughable video introduction by a crotchety curator: the world's museums are suffering a plague of "impossible" disappearances of world treasures like the *Pieta* and *Mona Lisa*.

An encounter with a mystic princess sends you in search of a renegade trying to use the treasures



to literally erase time. The game drags at a mummy's pace from Egypt to a Mayan ruin to Tibet to Atlantis—a near-perfect listing of Tomb Raider's locations!

Inane puzzles, so-so artwork, dead sound, and a complete lack of entertainment value are all Beyond Time has to offer. The haze of Myst is still upon us. —Daniel Morris

DEVELOPER: DreamCatcher Interactive
416-638-5000
WEB: www.dreamcatcherinc.com
PLATFORM: Win 3.1/
Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE: \$40



DemonStar

Shoot 'em!
Shoot 'em!

Maybe it wasn't "long-awaited" or even expected, but DemonStar, the sequel to arcade-action hit Raptor, is here. From your starship, choose power-ups to get a proton laser, ion cannon, or plasma cannon. Stick with one color, and you'll buff your weapon up into one slick shooter. Missiles and bombs are thrown in, too. If 18 levels aren't enough, have a friend join in on the same screen and blast away side by side (actually more enjoyable—until you start arguing about who gets what power-up...).

And here's a bonus: support for force feedback! Yep, get ready to



feel the action as you blast away or get nailed. I have to say that, after playing with and without force feedback, you'd never want to go back to a regular joystick—at least not with this game. A bit more than just a time-killer, this shoot-everything title's worth your \$20.

—Danny W. Lam

PUBLISHER: Ionos
602-607-3785
WEB: www.ionos.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE: \$20



Pharaoh's Ascent

Inside-out Tetris

Say you're trapped in the bowels of a pyramid and the only way out is up through chambers full of obstacles. Overcome them, move on, do it again. It's a lot like life.

It seems simple, but Pharaoh forces you to think several steps ahead—and if you like strategic, logical problem-solving, it's quite an absorbing experience.

Each chamber (91 altogether) holds a puzzle composed of vertically placed blocks of various densities. Shift or destroy them using pushing and shooting or let them drop via gravity to ultimately unite two magic stones—creating an exit without getting trapped, stuck,



squashed, or otherwise killed. For a bit of added movement, certain rooms feature beasties, flames, explosives, and other dangers you need to avoid.

With its surprisingly artistic backgrounds, excellent sound effects, amusingly uninspired '80s Casio-keyboard soundtrack (you can toggle it off), and no time-limit, Pharaoh's Ascent should make a low-key, entertaining habit for cerebral gamers of all ages.

—Karen Eng

PUBLISHER: Ambertec
800-551-6979
WEB: www.ambertec.com
PLATFORM: Win 95/
Win NT 4.0 CD
STREET PRICE: \$30



STRATEGY & TACTICS CHEATS

Well, the new-game rush may be at a seasonal slowdown, but those codes, they keep a-comin'! Liven up your spring-time with a drop of god mode, a dash of omniscience—all the stuff you need to keep your gaming garden fresh and rosy.

Balls of Steel

After starting one of the tables, press *Print Screen*, then type:

grand canyon: Ball blocker on/off.	warp core: Powerball enabled.
last legs: Set to final ball.	evil twin: Two-ball ready (some tables).
morlock: Time increased.	popcorn: Super-pops lit (some tables).
eloi: Time reduced.	whodunnit: (Varies by table.)
pitchfork: Adds points.	bucket: (Varies by table.)
couch potato: Video modes ready.	t-minus x (where x = 1–8): (Varies by table.)
freakshow: Extra ball lit.	
triplets: Three-ball ready.	

Deer Hunter

Type these codes at the map screen:

dhbambi: Shows all deer.
dudoeinheat: Lures deer to you.
dhstealth: Makes you invisible to deer.



DemonStar

To access the in-game cheat menu, open DOS screen and go to *DemonStar* directory. Type **SET INVOKEDDEBUGMODE=TRUE** (all caps). Go to Program and type **DS**. When you begin game, cheat window will pop up.

QUICK BITS

Dreams

During the game, hit **Ctrl + Alt + Down** to do a handstand and **Ctrl + r + i** for "girl power."

Longbow 2

Type **iwannasee** during credits to see secret quotes after credits.

Last Bronx

To give your character a joke weapon: (1) Select him with the arrow; (2) hit "start" key 13 times at the character screen; (3) hold the button down on the 13th time, and simultaneously press and hold the "block" key until Loading screen appears.



Joint Strike Fighter

Hit the following key combos during gameplay:

Ctrl + c + o: Instant victory in current campaign.	At the Pilot Select screen, hold down left Ctrl + right Ctrl while selecting a plane to gain access to every plane/helicopter in the game.
Ctrl + g + o: Instant loss in current campaign.	
Ctrl + s: Color smoke.	

Mysteries of the Sith

During gameplay, hit **t**, type one of these codes, then hit *Enter*.

iamagod: Become Über-Jedi.	trixie: Full mana.
boinga x: Invulnerability.	gospeedgo x: Slow-mo mode.
diediedie: All weapons.	quickzap: Warp to specific coordinate.
gimmestuff: Full inventory.	
gameover: Level skip.	
statuesque x: Freezes enemies.	
trainme: Raises Force level.	
freebird: Fly mode.	Note: On codes with x, x = 1 is on, x = 0 is off.
cartograph: All map.	



Wing Commander: Prophecy

At the simulator mission-select screen, type **alswantsmoreships**, and then follow the onscreen commands to fly enemy ships in the simulated missions. Hit **z** to activate enemy-ship selection.

While pressing *Shift*, type the following codes during space flight:

goodtarget: Changes targeting mode in cockpit to one similar to that used on turrets.
moretones: Enables "radio."
dynamite: Enables the following key-combos:
Ctrl + C: Makes you "uncollidable" (intangible).
Ctrl + I: Invincibility.
Ctrl + K: Self-destruct.



Ctrl + F12: Forward shields disappear on targeted enemy/friendly vessel. Hit second time to destroy targeted ship.



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The Great Mouse Hunt

By George T. Chronis and *PC Games* Readers

What input device action-gamers choose to frag with is one of the most personal decisions they can make. Running, jumping, aiming, rocket jumping, and free-looking take uniquely honed finesse and skill. But what may work perfectly in one person's hand will spell disaster in another's.

PC Games has wanted to do a roundup of input devices for a long time, but our staff always came up against a roadblock—bias. The predominant choice among our cabal of editors is any of the Logitech MouseMan three-button mice. To most of us, nothing else comes close. So in the interest of fairness, we asked shooters like yourselves what you use to circle-strafe in *Jedi Knight* and *Quake II*. The answers may reaffirm what you already know, or they may offer a surprise.

Logitech Trackman Marble

Based on an informal Web poll, our first surprising discovery was of a strong following behind Logitech's Trackman Marble (800-231-7717; www.logitech.com; \$79.95), a very untraditional thumb-driven trackball. Chad Harden summed it up best:

"For more reasons than just gaming, I went out and bought a Logitech Trackman Marble. I swear, my body count doubled! It's easier to make small, quick movements, I can center better, and it's way more precise (laser-guided). I use the three buttons on the trackball for jump, fire, and change weapon/rocket launcher. Then I use the arrow keys for the rest."

Microsoft IntelliMouse

Microsoft released the IntelliMouse (800-426-9400; www.microsoft.com; \$79.95) about two years ago as an aid for all those

Excel-based accountants who have to scroll through endless spreadsheet columns. Little did anyone realize that

what's basically an MS Mouse 2.0 with a vertical wheel between buttons one and two would become a useful fragging tool for the likes of PGL champion Dennis Fong (Thresh) and reader Will Smith (no, not *that* Will Smith):

"I saw Thresh play at E3 with an IntelliMouse. WOWSERS! What fine control... So naturally I thought, 'Hey, if I get one of those mice with the funny wheel, I can play like Thresh.' Wow, did my game improve."

Now I use an MS IntelliMouse, a keyboard, and a 3M Precise Mousing Surface to play my games. I use E, S, D, and F to control my player, and I bind the W, R, A, Q, G, etc., keys to different weapons, so I never have to cycle weapons. Know anyone who wants to buy a CyberMan or SpaceOrb?"

Logitech MouseMan

As mentioned above, Logitech's three-button MouseMan design has been a staple with fraggers for a long while. Why? The extra button comes in handy during a firefight, when easy access and swift execution can save the day. But which MouseMan are we talking about? The current incarnation is a new contour model (800-231-7717; www.logitech.com; \$49.95). It's longer than earlier, still-popular models that are still being shipped as OEM equipment with new computers. It even includes a fourth button on the side. The older MouseMan is squatter, and it's shaped

What the shooters like to use



like an inverse pyramid. You can still buy this baby in black as the MouseMan for Notebooks (\$49.95). The other three-button Logitech mouse is the \$12.95 Dexxa, which features a traditional oval design that sits lower to the tabletop. Paul Higginbotham explains why these three-button mice appeal to him:

"I'm a big fan of the ol' Logitech three-button mouse, and I even use the classic W-A-S-D configuration on my keyboard. The Logitechs rule because they're really made to be used, especially for males—that is, they're bigger and accommodate my hands very well. The very newest one in particular is so ergonomic, my hand melts right over it. The extra button facilitates a plethora of options for the Quaker, from calling up the RL when needed to a more complex self-written macro if need be. It lessens the clutter of extra peripherals on the desktop as well—nothing needed but your trusty old mouse and a keyboard."





FP Gaming Assassin 3D

Although mouse traditionalists can't see the beauty in the Assassin 3D trackball (510-494-2033; www.fpgaming.com; \$49.95), there's a growing number of action-gamers who do. They even have their own clan (www.execpc.com/~shailer). The Assassin is a major redesign of an existing trackball, turning it into a digital device with greater sensitivity than most normal trackballs. Used in tandem with a joystick, the Assassin is used for mouse-look duties, while the joystick handles forward and backward movement, plus strafing left and right. Configured correctly, this setup gives you access to three buttons on the Assassin, as well as four buttons and the hat-switch on the stick. Another highlight: circle-strafing is easier to master for some people when they're adjusting the view axis with the Assassin trackball instead of a mouse. But Mark Johnson says there's more to love:

"I used the keyboard-and-mouse combo at first when I was just learning to play Quake. It was eating me alive!!! I saw the Assassin 3D logo on Stomped and checked it out. It looked so cool, I had to get one. Within two to three weeks I started placing first and second regularly on the servers. The more I use it, the more I learn, and the smoother it becomes. I've had the Assassin for a year now, and there are some advantages: full 3D movement, and more precision when used with a

joystick like the SideWinder 3D Pro. I can outstrafe a mouser or Orber with more precision, given that my hands are on all the major controls like jump, spin, and weapons. While mousers are picking lint, I'll be kicking ass."

Logitech CyberMan 2

Gamers are nothing if not inventive, and some are discovering that the untraditional CyberMan 3D controller (800-231-7717; www.logitech.com; \$99.95) has unique virtues in first-person games. The unit is a large contoured device with eight programmable buttons on the left and what Stephen Toulouse describes as a "hockey puck" controller on the right. He uses it in place of a keyboard and says it works wonders:

"I never got comfortable playing with a mouse and keyboard. I love the mouse part with +mlook turned on, but I hated the fact that I could never comfortably use the keyboard with more than four keys. If I bind more, my hand starts to cramp up no matter what keyboard I use. Plus, keystrokes don't provide a comfortable response. I prefer the nice solid click of a button. The CyberMan 2

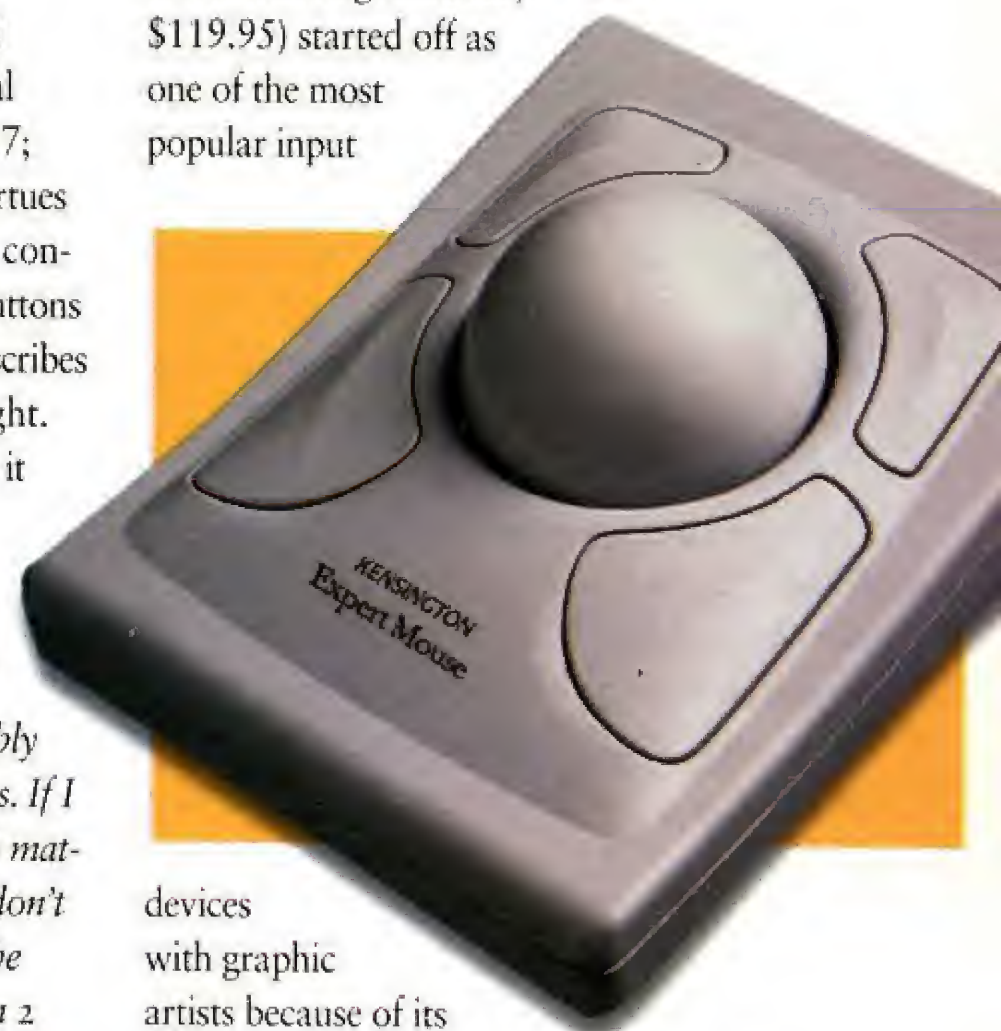


was the answer. The eight buttons are oriented in an especially ergonomic way for the left hand to use comfortably. I use these buttons to control forward, backward, jump, fire, strafe, and so on. My right hand uses an IntelliMouse with sensitivity turned up high. My setup has a total of 13 buttons: eight on the CyberMan 2, three on the mouse, and the up-and-down movement of the wheel provides the action of two more. Although it's weird to use a \$100

device just for its buttons, I am much more comfortable playing and can execute rocket jumps and circle-strafes with ease."

Kensington Expert Mouse 5.0

The Expert Mouse (800-535-4242; www.kensington.com; \$119.95) started off as one of the most popular input



devices with graphic artists because of its billiard-ball-sized trackball. Since then, the unit has been adopted by Quake fraggers, including some well known in competition, like Bitterboy on TEN. The Expert Mouse can be used as a generic two-button device or a four-button programmable trackball if Kensington's driver software package is used. The compact design is also easy to take to competitions and LAN parties.

"The Kensington trackball gives a gamer the ultimate experience," says Bitterboy. "Its maneuverability is outstanding. The aiming does take a little getting used to, but once it's mastered, your opponents will be surprised at how quickly you can turn, aim, and shoot. The Expert Mouse trackball is something I can highly recommend to a dedicated and serious gamer. Besides, one never runs out of mouse-pad space."

So there you have it: Don't settle for road-kill status. There's a fragging tool out there that could make the difference between just being competitive and leading the pack in upcoming shooters such as Half-Life, Duke Nukem Forever, and SiN.

Adding SCSI

By George T. Chronis

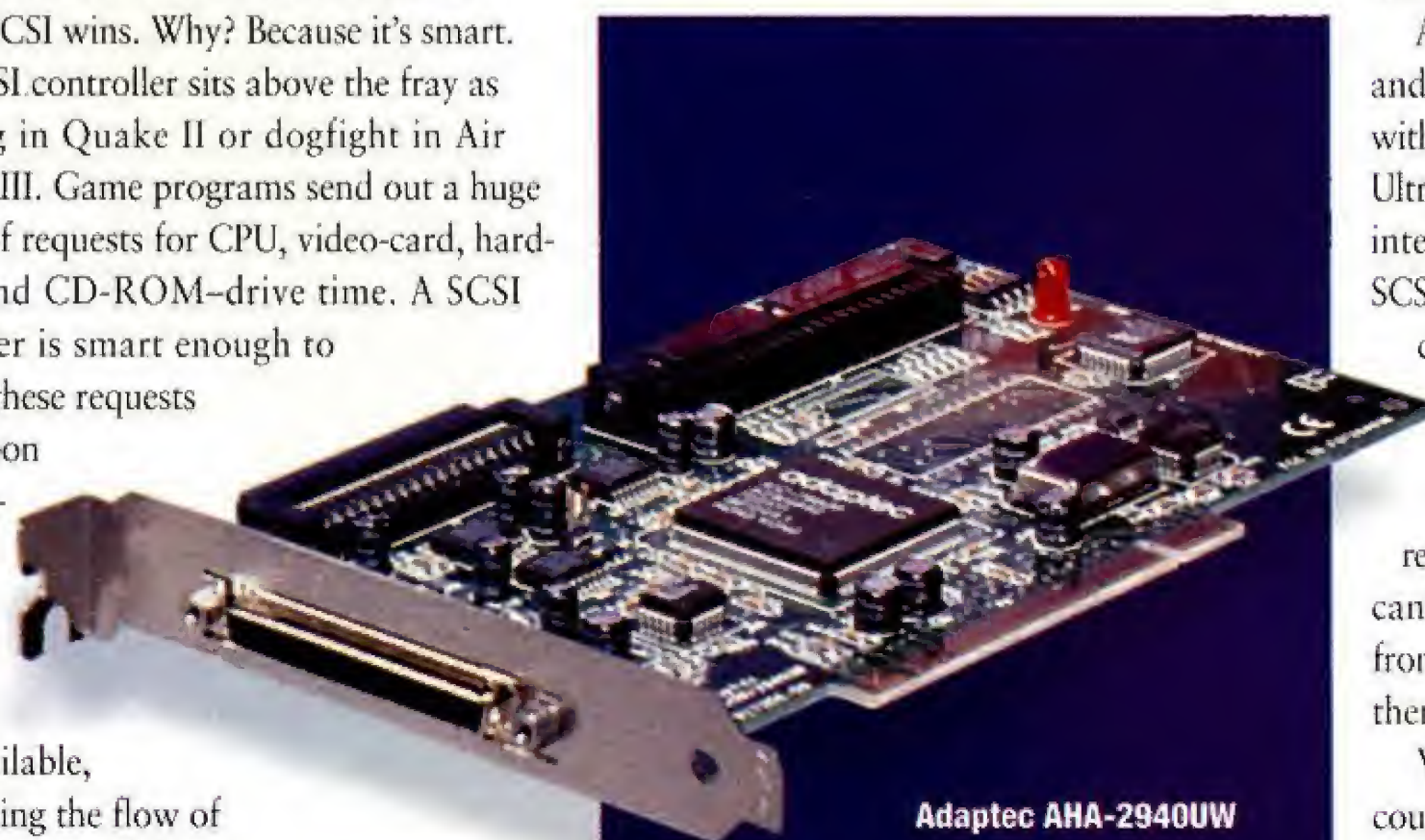
Sadly, the P200 we built for our story in last September's issue is starting to feel a little slow. It's become heart-breaking to listen to that once-mighty 5.1GB Maxtor IDE hard drive chugging to keep up with Jedi Knight and Quake II. Since there's still life in that P200 CPU, it's time for an upgrade. After identifying the options, we decided to add a SCSI hard drive.

If you've been playing games on a computer for awhile, you've heard about SCSI (Small Computer Systems Interface) controllers and hard drives. Most likely what you've heard is that SCSI is a faster but more expensive alternative format to IDE (Integrated Drive Electronics). With the advent of fast Ultra DMA controllers (an advanced form of IDE) and the free-fall in hard-disk prices, SCSI drives are no longer that much faster or as expensive as they once were. In fact, many Ultra DMA drives feature faster throughput. But given the choice of adding an Ultra DMA controller or a SCSI controller, SCSI wins. Why? Because it's smart.

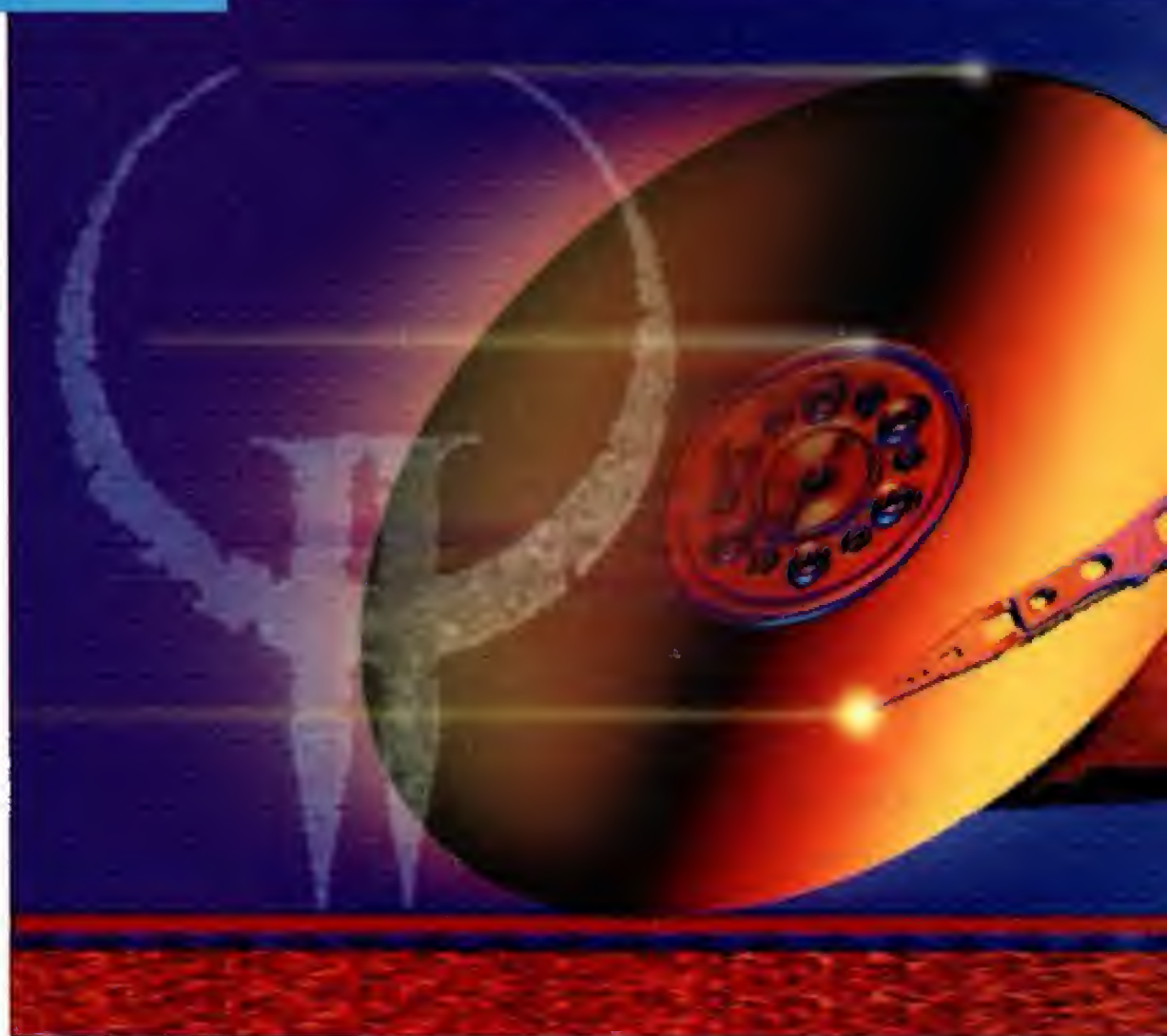
A SCSI controller sits above the fray as you frag in Quake II or dogfight in Air Warrior III. Game programs send out a huge stream of requests for CPU, video-card, hard-drive, and CD-ROM-drive time. A SCSI controller is smart enough to *manage* these requests based upon the capabilities of the SCSI peripherals available, maximizing the flow of information in all directions. Translated, that means your CPU doesn't have to devote resources to managing SCSI units—as is the case with IDE, EIDE, and Ultra DMA drives—at the same time it's trying to manage 500 units in Total Annihilation.

That's important if your games slow down under pressure. The game you're playing is more likely to get what it needs from your computer faster if you're using SCSI hardware.

Besides increasing the performance and longevity of your existing PC, installing a SCSI controller and hard drive isn't a dead end. You can later install these same components into a newly purchased system, so your investment won't be wasted. With longevity in mind, you should really only consider buying the fastest SCSI hardware out there—Ultra Wide SCSI. Just as IDE progressed to Enhanced IDE and Ultra DMA, SCSI has developed into SCSI-2, SCSI-3, and now Ultra Wide SCSI.



Adaptec AHA-2940UW



Tools

Adding SCSI to your PC is pretty easy. What you'll need is an open PCI slot, a SCSI controller, and a SCSI hard drive. For this story we obtained an Adaptec AHA-2940 Ultra Wide controller (800-442-7274; www.adaptec.com; \$235) and a Seagate Cheetah 4LP 4.5GB hard drive (800-732-4283; www.seagate.com; \$600). You can go for older SCSI formats for half that cost, but we wanted to play with the fastest components. That means Ultra Wide.

Adaptec is the leader in SCSI controllers, and we chose the 2940UW because it comes with three connectors: one 68-pin high-density Ultra Wide SCSI and one 50-pin standard SCSI internal port, plus an additional Ultra Wide SCSI external port. The 2940UW is really two controllers in one—an Ultra Wide SCSI and a standard SCSI-2. Each controller can handle up to eight SCSI devices, less one device ID (more on that later) reserved for the 2940UW. That means you can add up to 15 SCSI devices—everything from Zip drives to scanners—just by plugging them into the SCSI chain.

We latched onto the pricey Cheetah for a couple of reasons. First, it's brutally fast, with average seek times in the 7- to 8-millisecond range. Similar high-capacity Ultra DMA drives from Fujitsu aren't far off, with seek times between 9.5 and 10 milliseconds. Second, we've already had good experiences with Falcon Northwest PCs, which use these drives.



ID and Termination

All SCSI devices have an ID number to identify them on the SCSI chain. The controller is always preset to seven, and the main hard disk should always be set to zero (but not all drives from the factory are set at zero, so check before installation). Everything else can be set as desired. A general rule of thumb is that your most reliable devices, such as removable cartridge drives and CD-ROM drives, should get higher numbers like five and six at the end of the chain. Cranky equipment such as scanners should get lower numbers at the beginning of the chain, like one. It's okay if there are empty numbers unassigned in between. Most importantly, read the manual that came with your hard drive and make sure its ID is set to zero. Most SCSI CD-ROM drives are preset to three or four.

You'll also run into the term "termination." It means that the last component on the physical end of a SCSI chain should be terminated



SyQuest
SCSI SyJet

with a
connector plug,

so that the controller isn't looking for more devices than it has to work with. The good news is that all internal SCSI units have built-in termination, so you don't have to worry about it. Even some external SCSI devices you plug into the back of the SCSI controller, like your friendly Zip drive, have built-in termination. However, most scanners and many older removable cartridge drives will need a terminator plug if it's the last device on the external SCSI cable.

Installation

After you've backed up your important data, turn off the computer and open the case. Touch the power-supply casing to ground yourself from electrical discharge and look around inside. You'll notice two IDE connectors on your motherboard—for primary and secondary IDE channels. Your IDE hard drive

will be attached to a ribbon running to the primary IDE connector. Your CD-ROM drive may also be attached to this ribbon, or to another ribbon running to the secondary IDE channel. Let them be for a moment.

If you have a grounding bracelet (available at most computer stores), attach it to your wrist. Install the PCI SCSI controller into the available PCI slot you've chosen. Although SCSI and EIDE drives can run side-by-side, you'll want to start fresh and run Win 95 from the SCSI drive. Detach the ribbon and power cables from the IDE hard drive, remove the IDE drive from the computer case, and put it aside. Install the new SCSI hard drive (ID 0) in the same spot the IDE drive was removed from. Take the appropriate SCSI ribbon cable, attach it to the new drive, and then connect it to the connector on the SCSI controller card. The plugs are notched, so you can only attach them in the correct position. Attach the power-supply cable to the SCSI drive.

In our case, we also wanted to install a SyQuest SCSI SyJet 1.5GB internal removable cartridge drive (800-245-7334; www.syquest.com; \$297). If it had been an Ultra Wide SCSI device like the Cheetah, we could have added it to the same ribbon cable. Since the SyJet (ID 3) uses a standard SCSI ribbon, we took the extra ribbon cable provided with the 2940UW, attached it to the SyJet, and then plugged it into the other connector on the controller card.

If we'd had a SCSI CD-ROM drive to add to the mix, that could've been put on the SyJet's ribbon as well. At least until Ultra DMA CD-ROM drives reach us, SCSI drives can transfer data more quickly.

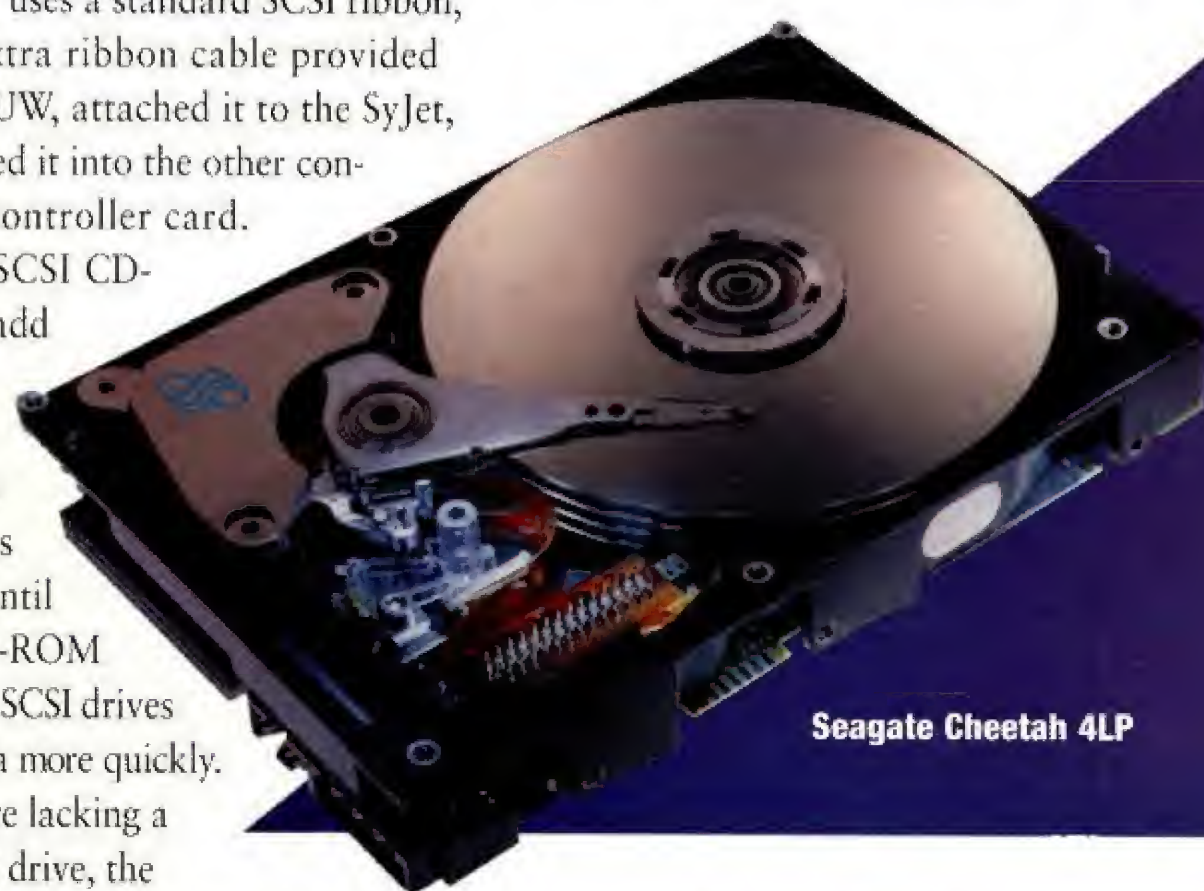
Since we were lacking a SCSI CD-ROM drive, the existing IDE 24x Mitsumi would have to soldier on. The ribbon-cable plug that had been connected to the IDE hard drive was plugged into the Mitsumi, and the secondary channel IDE ribbon was removed entirely. That done, we closed up the case.

Boot

SCSI controllers have their own built-in BIOS. When you boot the computer, the memory is checked, and then the SCSI BIOS does its thing. It will identify your SCSI units and their ID numbers. Partition and format the SCSI hard drive as you would any IDE unit. Install Win 95, and you're up and running. Win 95 has built-in driver support for SCSI controllers, but you can also use the disk provided with the controller card for the most recent drivers. Windows 95 also has built-in support for SCSI removable cartridge drives such as the SyJet, so there's no need for drivers—just insert the cartridge and go. Again, since SCSI is smart, the same goes for SCSI CD-ROM drives. There's no need to add `mscdex.exe` or IDE device drivers to your `autoexec.bat` or `config.sys` files. The SCSI drive is recognized in both DOS and Win 95 without your having to worry about such things.

Performance

The once state-of-the-art Maxtor hard drive scored a 124 last September on our benchmark tests (our baseline being 100) in the same system. The Cheetah leapt up to a score of 242—almost double the performance.



Seagate Cheetah 4LP

Benchmarks aside, the old P200 seems much zippier now, and games load perceptibly quicker than they used to. More importantly, I have yet to be left hanging in midair during a Quake II firefight, waiting for my hard disk to catch up with the action.

Hercules Thriller

RATING: A-

Since the nVIDIA RIVA 128 chipset proved that companies other than 3Dfx could deliver Voodoo-class performance in Direct3D, we've been eagerly awaiting cards based on Rendition's new V2200 chipset. Rendition's last chipset debut, the V2100, proved to be a winner in our review of Diamond's V2100-based Stealth II (February 1998). The V2200 chipset is even more powerful. Hercules' Thriller, the first V2200 card, doesn't disappoint.

The Thriller is a top performer both in benchmarks and in the real world of Direct3D games. We loaded Tomb Raider II and were able to turn on all the hardware acceleration tricks supported by the game. Big deal, you ask? Well, we ran the game at 1024-by-768 resolution without noticeably dropping frames. Most accelerator boards we've looked at couldn't handle this test because they peaked out at 6MB of RAM. The Thriller is fully



The Thriller pares swiftly in D3D games like Jedi Knight.

loaded, with 8MB of on-board SDRAM. The card's documentation makes no reference to how much of that memory is divided between texture and frame-buffer duties, which means memory is likely allocated dynamically accord-

ing to the current graphics-display mode.

The Thriller's biggest advantage is that it's a standalone graphics solution, offering breakout 2D and 3D performance not only in full-screen game modes, but also on your desktop, in a Window, wherever. In 3D chores, the Thriller performed admirably. At press time, we were still waiting on a V2200-specific native patch for Quake II, but running

the V1000 VQuake driver with Quake delivered 35 fps in 640-by-480 resolution and 25 fps in 1024-by-768 resolution. If there was a driver optimized for the faster V2200, the card would've achieved higher frames-per-second. Switching to Direct3D, the Thriller

continued on page 108

Gamestick 14

RATING: B

My first response to the new CH Products Gamestick 14 was "Thank you." It has buttons in places where buttons should be. This more fully featured follow-up to the earlier Gamestick product is a joy to use, and it's the first CH joystick to include a throttle lever—like Microsoft's SideWinder Pro's. CH's second entry into the mainstream stick market offers nothing significantly new and no surprise technological updates, but what it does, it does very well.

The Gamestick's 14 buttons include a normal trigger, a small, hard-to-see button right under that, two on top near the familiar hat-switch, and two more hat-switches and two buttons on the base. The base hat-switches are placed on either side of the joystick, catering to both left- and right-handed users. The throttle lever is below the stick on the base, allowing you to use it with your thumb.

If a game doesn't directly support the Gamestick 14, you'll need to use the included Joystick Control Center program to make the extra buttons emulate keyboard commands. Otherwise, the peripheral becomes a basic four-button joystick with a hat-switch.

When I first fired up the Joystick Control Center, it was a little intimidating (CH programming software has a huge reputation for being daunting) because it comes with only one paragraph of documentation. Luckily, what you need is documented in the online help program. (For those whose grasp of reality is more easily secured by holding a "real," paper-based manual, this might be a bit distressing.) After I read the online help, the Control Center was simple enough to use, and I was up and running. It also has an option to program a button with up to five different modes, allowing the same button to perform many functions, depending on which mode you're in. This is where I ran into a snag.

After programming and saving the template for a particular game, you have to run a separate program that functions like a TSR (terminate-and-stay-resident) program. A small box appears in the upper left-hand corner of your screen, showing you what mode you're in. I could see how this worked when I ran a game in a window, but when running a game full-screen, it was hard to tell what mode I was in, and I had no clue which button did what.

All in all, this is a good joystick at a reasonable price for the average gamer. But tech newbies and hardcore types should look elsewhere, especially if you're a flight-sim enthusiast. (CH Products; 760-598-2518; www.chproducts.com; street \$70)

—Chris Tou





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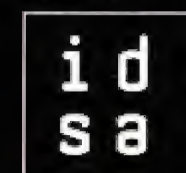
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TECHNOBABBLE S.O.S.

*Hard-drive delays
and the DirectX hex*

By Patrick Marshall

Q I recently bought a 1.6GB hard drive to replace my old 40MB IDE drive. I had to buy a generic brand, because that was all I could afford. I've noticed that it's pretty slow: the average seek time is 9.74ms, and the transfer rate is 4848.57Kbps. Could this be due to the fact that it's a generic brand, or is it because I have a slow Enhanced IDE I/O controller?

Miguel Rangel
Hayward, CA

A Pretty hard to diagnose your situation without knowing what model hard drive or controller you're talking about. I wouldn't knock the seek time, but the transfer rate is decidedly on the slow side. Are those the official stats from the manufacturer, or did you get them from benchmark programs? Also, is the new drive Enhanced IDE? I'd bet your existing controller is standard IDE, which would mean you might not get the speed you'd expect out of the EIDE drive. If that's your problem, saving up for an

Ultra DMA controller would be wise. Ultra DMA is much faster than both IDE and EIDE, yet it's completely backward-compatible, so your investment wouldn't be wasted.

Q Just recently, I got a new Compaq Presario 4704. I installed Red Alert, went to launch it, and a warning came up that said "Computer does not meet audio requirements." Only the DOS version worked. So then I tried to install Diablo. It wouldn't launch. I noticed that both games use DirectX. I called Compaq, and they said that my model computer doesn't work with DirectX games. Is there anything I can do to run these games?

n64boy
Via email

A Looks like you're another victim of tech support. Yes, your hunch about DirectX is correct. Upon trolling Compaq's Web site at www.compaq.com/at/home/support/softpaq/pages/SP3183.html, I found that the chipset of your



ESS-based sound controller needs to have its BIOS upgraded to handle DirectX 3.0 audio drivers. (This revision was posted last May.) Hopefully this BIOS upgrade supports DirectX 5.0 drivers that came later; unfortunately, Compaq did not return my calls to confirm this.

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PC	Falcon Mach V	Falcon Northwest; 800-258-6778; approx. \$4,000	A
Monitor	Optquest V775 17-inch	ViewSonic; 800-888-8583; approx. \$600	A
CD-ROM drive	FX240	Mitsumi; 972-550-7300; approx. \$199	A-
Sound card	AWE64	Creative Labs; 800-998-5227; \$129	A
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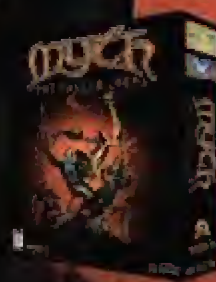
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The Ultimate Per4mer Wheel

RATING: D

For the record, I love gadgets, and I like racing games. But like so many things that feed off one another, if the combination isn't right, you're left with a bitter taste in your mouth about the whole deal. That's how I feel about Platinum Sound's Ultimate Per4mer Racing Wheel with pedals.

The wheel has 15 programmable buttons, 280-degree rotation, and LED lights. Programming the buttons in a game's setup menu is easy enough, assuming your game supports this many buttons. What this product doesn't have: good grip, sturdy structure, overall quality.

The wheel can be placed on a flat surface using suction cups; or, if you prefer, you can

clamp it onto the edge of your desk. The steering wheel is tilted at an angle, so you have to lean forward to really grip it while simultaneously stretching your legs out for the pedals. For those who don't have an elongated body, this will make you form an uncomfortable semi-C shape when using this unit.

My biggest gripe about the wheel has got to be the cheap plastic. It reminds me of those snap-off parts on my old airplane models—you know, the kind that don't require glue for assembly? The pedals seem solid enough, at least, with their big metallic gears sticking out.

Installing the Win 95 drivers was smooth—I was up and running in no time. But playing Need for Speed II: SE was a horrible experience. I knew there'd be a big drawback to the 280-degrees thing. I turned the wheel. Nothing happened. I turned it a little more. Still nothing. I finally turned it almost all the way to its

limit—

whoohoo! Of course, by this time, I was scraping the walls and everybody was laughing. "It's the freakin' wheel, I tell ya!" I insisted, but nobody believed me. I was tempted to configure some of those 15 buttons to steer the car and abandon the wheel altogether. Playing Daytona USA yielded a similar experience—I was careening all over the track (naturally I made sure no one else was around this time).

There are good wheel/pedal combos like ThrustMaster's NASCAR Racing Wheel, and then there are the Per4mers of the world. I just hope it hasn't ruined my love for driving games. Steer clear of this one—pun intended. (Platinum Sound; 602-368-9490; www.platinumsound.com; street \$99)—*Danny W. Lam*



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continued from page 104

averaged between 55 fps and 60 fps in Jedi Knight using 640-by-480 resolution, and 25 fps in 1024-by-768 resolution.

For those yearning to play on a big screen, TV-out connectors let you connect the unit to a television. There's even a connection for 3D shutter glasses for those trying to achieve virtual reality on the cheap. The card also features basic video-capture capability suitable for frame-capture and hobbyist applications. As we said, this board doesn't pull punches.

Downsides include a perception among many hardcore gamers that Hercules boards and drivers are often buggy—based on some bad publicity revolving around Hercules' first Voodoo Rush board. Indeed, the first Thriller board sent to us—a late beta—failed to work at all. Once a functioning board arrived, the Thriller installed and worked flawlessly. The display-properties applets that come with the card lack some of the polish of those from companies like Diamond, Canopus, and STB, but performance-wise, Hercules seems to have banished the bugs. (Hercules; 510-623-6030; www.hercules.com; street \$249)

—*David Gerding*

These days, many AOL users are finding themselves S.O.L.

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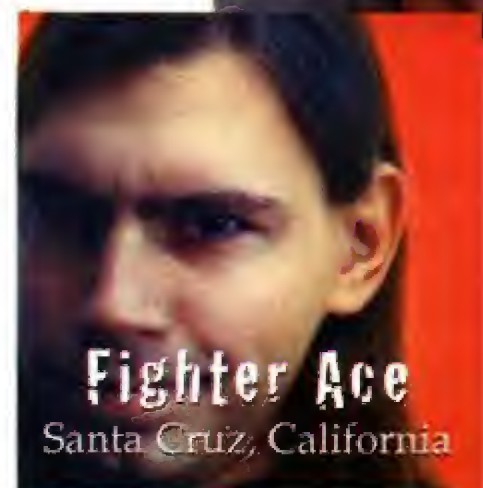
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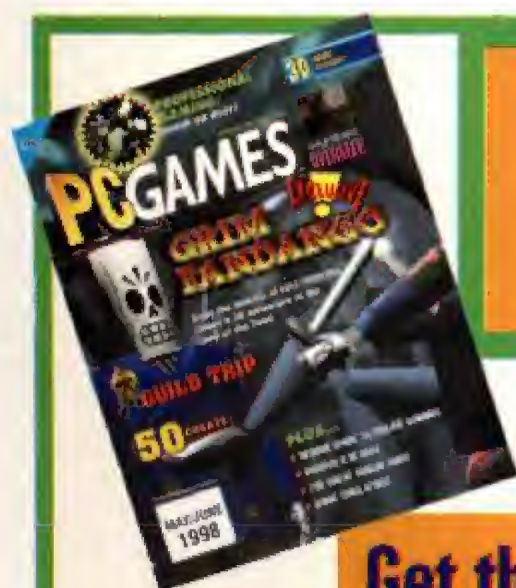
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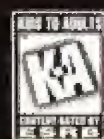
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FACE-OFF

Snipe
Blade

Online-Game Services—Who Needs 'Em?

Whether they're free or pay-to-play, are online-game services worth the trouble? As they strive to find a revenue model that will keep them in business, they're still signing up thousands of new gamers while having to answer questions about the quality of online play. Snipe argues in frustrated **bold** that such services have never fulfilled their promise and should be gibbed. Blade parries in calm, measured *italics* that all is ducky in the world of online services.

I'm tired, I tell ya! I'm tired of broken connections, I'm tired of lag, I'm tired of spending 30 minutes building an army in an RTS game only to have my ally get disconnected in the middle of our attack. I'm tired of broken promises, and I'm tired of pings so high you could land a space shuttle on that many numerals strung together. I'm now convinced that there isn't anything an online-game service can do for me that cannot be better achieved by independently run Internet servers, Usenet groups, and IRC or ICQ chat.

I'm tired of the whining, I'm tired of the complaints, I'm tired of the disrespect for what some of these online-gaming companies have achieved. Lag, broken connections, and high pings are a problem everywhere on the Internet, whether you're playing on an online service or not. Maybe you should try using a reputable ISP instead of AOL as your gaming provider. In the days before online services, I had to find a few buddies, all ready at the same time, all prepared to go through trials and tribulations for a few brief moments of gaming pleasure. And now? I have a huge base of potential opponents—ready when I am, attuned to various skill levels, pandering to my every gaming whim. Beat that with your IRC shenanigans.

At least in the old days, once you got the game working, you didn't get cut off because the gaming service crashed. Online-game services today are great for introductions and chat—especially chat about which free Internet server to go play on. But those minor benefits aren't worth the hassles. I can play any game I want for free just fine over the Internet. (Oh, and I use EarthLink and WebBullet, not AOL, thank you very much!)

Maybe you can—but what about Joe or Joanna Newbie? There are a lot of people out there who've never ventured into the Internet surf and

haven't the first clue about where to go to play their favorite games online. Gaming services pay people to hold newbie hands and get them up and running. They also provide a community element—people meet, make friends, play in tourneys, and get involved in other fun stuff not available on the Net.

Rah, rah, rah! Are you getting paid by TEN, Mplayer, Internet Gaming Zone, or HEAT? I still maintain there's nothing you can do on a service that I can't do on the Net—for free. There are user-run clans, leagues, and ladders for all the games I like to play,

and they're usually run better than a gaming service's tourney. I've found a community of people, and we don't need a childish chat interface filled with the rants of Ritalin-deprived rugrats to communicate—email, ICQ, and IRC work much better.

Your Net snobbery is beginning to show, and you simply can't do everything online that you can on a service—let's see you chat up your buddies to play Ultima Online and WarBirds and Dark Sun and GemStone III and on and on. Online-gaming services offer tons of games in every genre—in one place, with an easy-to-use interface. You don't have to go and learn a bunch of different chat programs and ping 50 servers before you can start playing. The services are also attempting revolutionary things, like UO's persistent universe.

Oh, come on—learning ICQ and GameSpy is no more difficult than learning the ins and outs of a game service's interface, plus it's much more satisfying. And excuse me, but didn't you just write a column about how deserted dear Britannia is these

days? That "revolutionary" experiment is plagued with bugs, player killing, and other problems. You want me to pay for that? Admittedly, it does have its share of problems. But give 'em a break—the lessons UO is teaching the online-gaming industry could result in brave new worlds.

At this point, the argument degenerated into a "could not," "could so" screaming match. When their throats were sore, our heroes agreed to disagree. Snipe left to clean up his email accounts, which were suddenly spammed with thousands of junk posts from "anonymous" servers. Blade continues to lead a tranquil existence chopping logs and tending sheep in Ultima Online.



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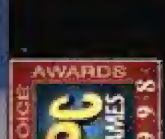
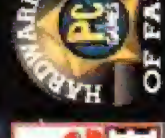
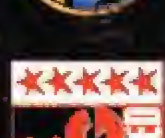
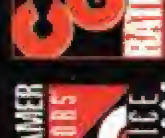
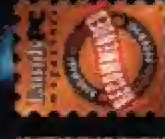


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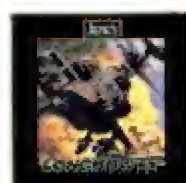
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